

INDIA

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S T Lakshmikumar

India : MY India

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Publication

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नमो गुरुभ्यः

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The views presented here regarding my motherland, its past, the present and possible future are subjective. The first of these largely independent vignettes explains what the work is all about. I do not know if these views would be useful or palatable to anyone else but hope the final product is coherent and presentable.

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INDIA : MY INDIA

These are a series of mostly independent vignettes or short essays on subjectively chosen facets of India, which have been strung together to create my personal advice to "MY India". The temerity to address diverse areas reflects my philosophy that both in personal and societal decision making, highly precise enquiry by experts leads to intellectual satisfaction but does not offer useful guidance for action. I had argued, hopefully coherently and persuasively, in my earlier books^{1,2}, that one need not be bamboozled by complexities of advanced science or of theology. In many areas of human endeavor, more complex and sometimes more quantitative analysis leads only to intellectual gymnastics and not conclusions which can be used by individuals with confidence. This is as true of the choice between capitalism and

1. How Well Do We Know It? Print on demand publication. <http://pothi.com/pothi/book/s-t-lakshmikumar-how-well-do-we-know-it>

2. On Walking The Knife Edge Of Science And Religion. Print on demand publication. <http://pothi.com/pothi/book/s-t-lakshmikumar-walking-knife-edge>

socialism as of science and theology. I feel that it is within the capacity of every individual to assess the strength and usefulness of the knowledge offered by the experts even if one cannot participate in creating such knowledge. The present effort is an attempt to demonstrate the utility of this approach to help the society in which I live.

What is this "MY India" which I am addressing? India is the name derived from the Greek name "*Indos*" of the river we now call Sindhu in Indian languages. But this river is now largely in Pakistan! While the constitution of India begins with the words, "India that is Bharat...", today many refer to the modern, economically advanced urban segment of the country as India and the poor, traditional, agrarian, rural part as Bharat. A democratic government elected by the free citizens of India exists. But many residents of the Kashmir valley and some North Eastern States consider that they have been included in this democracy by force. The Maoist guerrillas in the forests violently refuse to accept the democratically elected government of India and seek to fundamentally alter the society which elects the government. Complementing these are the Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and other individuals who are not willing to grant complete legitimacy to the existing system. They exaggerate the conflict between India and various disadvantaged groups in Bharat, denounce the system for permitting the inequality and dismiss the concept of a single "MY India".

So, I have to define it for myself. "MY India" is the society that seeks to acknowledge itself as a part of the worldwide human society and learn from common human experience. It questions and evaluates all of accumulated human knowledge without being emotionally committed to either "ancient wisdom" or "any specific modern ideology". It does not ignore or hide reality, even with the best of intentions. Most importantly, it is unique in not being bamboozled by experts. Secure in the knowledge that fundamental theories are far too weak, it holds that personal and societal decisions can be guided by

self acquired approximate understanding. "MY India" has the confidence that those alienated from itself can be persuaded to join by arguments and plans. It is confident in the plans it outlines as a framework for self improvement. It rejects the dominance and dictatorship of one ideology or another and seeks for itself only a practical program for alleviating alienation and creating progress. It does not recommend correction of historical injustices. It will not seek reparations for criminal acts of the ancestors. However, it accepts the social responsibility to compensate for present handicaps.

These claims made for "MY India" are very ambitious. A call for critical examination is in itself no novelty. Every one likes to think that personal views held passionately have been critically examined and defended. The most important content of religion is the belief in something that is "nonphysical". Despite this, every religion builds a sophisticated theology to critically examine the claims of not only other religions but of all knowledge. Many swear by Marxism, as the only rational explanation of human history. For them, Marxist scholars have demonstrated the truth of Marxism and failure of all other ideologies. In addition to the Marxist, the environmentalist and the free market fundamentalist, among those feeling alienated from "MY India" are people lamenting the loss of a "golden era". Some of them blame the British imperialists for this loss, others blame the Muslim invasion and still others the Aryan invasion. Each of these believe in their own identification of the "true malady" of India and their own cure for it. Similarly, all ideologues are convinced of their ability to transform the society.

However, the claim regarding the limited utility of expert advice is unique to my effort. This grand claim requires the present small volume to be largely self sufficient. The analysis in my two earlier books mentioned above is essential but cannot be repeated without disturbing the continuity. Whenever absolutely necessary, the reader is directed to the relevant chapters of these books through a footnote.

But for these, I have not included any suggestions for further reading or references to the vast storehouse of human knowledge. Again, in the interests of continuity, I have tried to make the pieces largely independent. This has resulted in sometimes repeating the same idea in multiple essays.

The short, independent essays have been grouped into three parts, "The Past", "The Present" and "The Future". "The Present" deals with "MY India" as I see it, particularly, the defects and the problems in the contemporary society. It will, to the best of my ability be an objective description of reality of both Bharat and India as differentiated above. "The Future" contains, very specific and practical suggestions to transform the present and achieve "MY India" in all its glory. I can hope that the objective exposition of contemporary reality may be convincing. I can also dream that the logic of the plan for the future may be convincing.

But the very concept of discussing "The Past" without any expertise might appear foolish and may even be counterproductive. After all, the past is not a matter of contemporary experience. The recent history of human civilization is constructed by scholarly historians studying ancient texts and archaeological evidence. Surely amateurish dabbling in these matters could be pathetic and may even tarnish the other sections of the monograph namely "The Present" and "The Future". So why bother with the next few pieces which deal with the past? Partly personal vanity of thinking that these views are original and unique. Partly to show the limitations of the experts and their scholastic knowledge. Partly because I feel genuinely that lies told with good intentions are counter productive.

Some of my comments about history may appear to be anti-Muslim, anti-Christian or even antisocial. One ghost has to be laid to rest once and for all. I, a member of the brahmin caste and male am neither responsible for the crimes committed by my great-grandfather

on dalits and others “lower castes” as he would have considered them nor by contemporary men on women. Nor do I claim reparations from the current British society for the acts of omission and commission that caused suffering to my forefathers during the colonial rule. Similarly, Muslims or for that matter, anyone presently living in India share no blame for historical crimes, if any committed by others of their caste, community or gender, whether in the distant past or the present. We are all responsible only for our own actions.

A huge problem remains. The megalomania of an individual without any halo of greatness in any area, making such grand pronouncements will probably be held against the advice. An ancient Sanskrit saying springs to mind. "The fate of wise people is similar to that of fragrant, white “*malati*” flowers. They either adorn (rule) the heads of all people, or dry up in the forest unnoticed (scorned and ignored)". So be it with my writings. I leave it for the reader to judge and decide if the advice is wise. A poetic saying from my mother tongue Telugu laments "Of what use is a shining full moon in the forest (there are no lovers there!). True! But must the moon care?

Does "MY India" include anyone other than myself?

Maybe it will.

Will the advice be acceptable to anyone except me?

There is always Hope.

Hope, that the opinions will at the very least be read to the end.

MY INDIA : THE PAST

1857

The conflict during 1857-58 between the British East India Company, which by then largely controlled most of the Indian subcontinent and several native rulers is called the “First War Of Indian Independence” in every school text book in India. Nana Sahib, Laxmi Bai, Mangal Pandey and Bahadur Shah Zafar who fought with the British are venerated Indian heroes. If one follows the scholastic analyses of historians, there are as many facets to 1857 as there are historians. To some British historians, it was a mutiny by the Indian soldiers employed by the East India Company. These Hindus and Muslims rebelled since they were forced to use cartridges which were allegedly greased with fat of cows and pigs. To some others, the conflict was a reaction by the princes and sultans whose adopted children were denied “pensions” by the company due to the new “principle of lapse”. Some historians highlight the localization of the fighting to north India. Others view it as a nascent peasant or people’s rebellion reflecting the unconscious reaction to imperialism. For some others, the participants aimed to restore a pan-Indian empire and this constitutes the emergence

of a nationalistic spirit. For many, the brutality of the British in squashing the rebellion triggered the Indian independence movement.

Each of these theories will be supported by historical evidence since they are all the results of scholastic study. One can leave arguments of the relative strength of the various views to trained historians. Even without being expert historian, one can realize that many of these claims are possibly true. There are strong religious reactions, even in contemporary India to events such as the publication of cartoons of Prophet Mohammad in Europe or the depiction of nude Hindu deities in art. It stands to reason that Indians in the mid nineteenth century were even more religious. They would have been easily offended by the story about cartridge grease being the fat of pigs and cows. Among the major combatants on the Indian side, Nana Sahib was an adopted son and Laxmi Bai was fighting on behalf of her adopted son. Many of the native rulers had accepted “annual pensions” and stopped fighting the East India Company which actually ruled. The policy of stopping pensions to adopted children of native rulers (the principle of lapse as it was called), could have led to the conflict. While Indian historians highlight the brutality of the British, the British press reports of the period emphasized the brutality of the Indian participants. In any case, modern humanitarian ideas were far into the future. At the time of the conflict, slavery was not universally abolished, the International Red Cross was not even conceptualized till 1863 and the Universal Declaration Of Human Rights was a hundred years away. I for one would expect nothing other than brutality on all sides.

Rather than try to evaluate and reconcile these complex issues, I would highlight the contribution and legacy of Indians who did not participate in this conflict. These individuals include Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917), Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, (1820-1891), Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-1894), Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836-1886) and Mahatma Phule (1827-1890). As far as I know, none of them ever regretted not participating in this conflict, even while they

severely criticized the colonial rulers. “MY India” is the current society built on the foundations of men such as these and their successors.

Most Indians would not question their legacy. Be it, modern education, female literacy, contemporary literature, opposition to inhuman social practices, reformation of the Hindu religion or democratic transformation of the country, the impact of these great personalities on modern India has been enormous. Even a revolutionary who is committed to ushering in a Marxist society and rejects the agenda of these reformers as inadequate has to recognize and respect their attempt to learn from common human heritage. Nonetheless, many contemporary Indians would not be happy with the toleration and occasional admiration of the British expressed by some of these reformers. But the bitter truth has to be faced. It is difficult to appreciate anything in the Indian participants of the 1857 conflict other than the fact that they fought with the erstwhile colonial masters. Their attitudes were medieval. The leaders and obviously the followers were looking back into the past, with a nostalgia for an imagined perfect king. No one was aware of either the French Revolution or the American Constitution. In other words, they were not learning from the common human experience and knowledge of mankind. Sadly, with the exception of a few extraordinary individuals like Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833), it is difficult to name many Indians of that era who were modern in their outlook.

One does not need to be an expert to recognize that the halo of personal valor that has been placed around key figures such as Rani Laxmi Bai or Tantia Tope is merely modern mythology. Ballads praising the individual bravery of Laxmi Bai can be inspiring. But one should not hide from the reality of war in 1857. In 1857 war was not the battle of Mahabharata where the “*maharathi*” or great warrior was supreme. Mythology claims that such warriors could fight with 11,000 soldiers. Wars in the nineteenth century were won or lost by planning and training of soldiers. For example, Napoleon, the emperor of France was not

fighting a duel with Wellington, the British general in the Battle of Waterloo in 1814. They were both planning strategies. The superiority of the “company” forces of that era, which led to their success lay in their reliance on contemporary technology like the telegraph and professional training rather than emotional, sometimes fanatical servitude to a hereditary ruler.

To make this assessment one does not need to be a great scholar or a trained historian. Admittedly, even the above discussion on the 1857 conflict needs some knowledge from a social studies textbook of the high school. Reading the textbook is needed to know that Vidyasagar pioneered the education of girls and that Mahatma Phule contributed to the reform of Hinduism. We learn that French Revolution defined the rights of man and citizen in 1789 and that the American Constitution has been the basis for the governance of the USA since 1788. The lessons in the text book are condensed from the work of the expert historians. However, if every detail identified by every expert historians is accepted as Gospel truth, one ends being bamboozled by experts. Thankfully, it is not difficult to critically examine the factual information and take a personal decision.

The death throes of medieval India in 1857 were a human tragedy with perhaps a hundred thousand deaths. But 1857 is not merely the start of a new India that I am claiming as “MY India”, it is the closure of uncritical acceptance of tradition. To be sure, 1857 is not some kind of specific cutoff date. The emergence of individuals who were willing to learn from all possible sources of human knowledge, evaluate for themselves and decide on action for the future started around that time. For me, the process is not complete and therein lies the real tragedy of the current situation where many feel alienated. This independent approach shows how hope emerged from the tragic events of 1857. Ninety years later hope had to emerge from an even larger tragedy.

Was the defeat in 1857 inevitable? Was subjugation by the British a necessity for the emergence of “MY India”? Would India have been better off if the British had been sent packing in 1857? Should one condone the racial bigotry of the British? Were the Europeans justified in thinking that civilizing the rest of the world was their mission and that it really was a “white man’s burden”? Other vignettes throw light on these questions.

British In India

The British East India Company, won its first major battle on Indian soil at Plassey, Bengal in 1757. By about 1817, the company was ruling most of the subcontinent and the remaining "native" rulers were in reality totally controlled by the company. The period of British ascendancy from 1757 which ended with Indian Independence in 1947, coincided with the period when India lost its competitive position among the nations of the world.

Both economically and culturally the kingdoms and sultanates before this period could hold their own against anyone in the rest of the world. Thus, our school textbooks proudly refer to the foreign visitors who praised the glories of the various Indian cities and empires. However, some aspects are not emphasized in these textbooks. Firstly, in those medieval empires, a minuscule minority cornered the surplus production of the rest to display their pomp and glory. The majority toiled in misery. The life expectancy at birth in all human societies till the twentieth century was close to 30 years! Secondly, the princes and sultans could hoard gold, but the low levels of technology ensured that

their lives were miserable compared to a modern middle class individual. For example, Shah Jahan the great Mogul emperor sat on the peacock throne (one and half tons of gold) and could build the incomparable Taj Mahal to bury his favorite queen. But he could provide her with neither good medicines, nor proper contraceptives. She died giving birth to her fourteenth child in nineteen years of marriage. This was equally true elsewhere in the world. The most significant archeological fact about kingship is that the teeth of most Egyptian Pharaohs were ground down by grit in the wheat floor that they ate. They could build pyramids stocked with tons of gold, but could not get a decent quality wheat floor. The key factor remains that by all accounts, India was as good (or as bad) as the best society of that era in the rest of the world.

By the time of Indian independence, India was among the poorest countries of the world. So, what was the role of the British in this deterioration? Sixty odd years after Independence, India is still not a member of the advanced countries but is not a typical third world country either. It has been a mature, functioning democracy most of the time. Its major export is computer software and it is a vibrant if incoherently noisy society. Once again, what role did the British play in this? How did the British contribute to the two simultaneously? In common parlance, we speak of India, the urbanized modernizing part of the country and of Bharat, the rural underdeveloped part that resists modernization. Thus, one sees the British as having destroyed Bharat and initiated the creation of India. It looks almost as if the British were implementing the Marxist dogma that the old has to be destroyed in order to create the new.

Let us once again use some information available in a school text book. European traders opened sea routes for trade with India and Asia by about 1500AD. Vasco da Gama became the first European to come to India through the sea route. The European traders could thus bypass the Arabs who controlled trade along the land routes. European

powers like England, France, Denmark, Spain and Portugal participated in the trade and intervened in the conflict between the native rulers. In that era, exports from India were not primarily spices, but cotton cloth, iron and steel. India exported more than it imported and so till about 1750 the European trader had to bring gold and silver into the country to purchase goods. In the aftermath of Nadir Shah looting the Mogul treasury in 1738, the British managed to overrun India in a matter of less than 60 years, from the battle of Plassey in 1757 to the third Anglo-Maratha war in 1817.

The British largely used Indian soldiers trained and managed by them. Popular mythology attributes the utterly one sided conflicts between the British East India Company and the native rulers to lack of unity among Indians, treacherous individuals and ultimately the British policy of "divide and rule". The real cause is the medieval world view of the Indians as will be discussed in some of these articles.

Having achieved ascendancy, the British initiated some steps which have led to the formation of modern India. For example, William Bentinck abolished *sati*, the death of a widow on her husband's funeral pyre in 1829. This initiated social reform. Macaulay introduced English education in 1835. This introduced western ideas into India and established English as a link language. It also led to Indian languages becoming less important. The contributions of the individual British are at best grudgingly acknowledged by many contemporary Indians. It is taken for granted that these actions were taken by the British as aids in governing their colonial empire and had the unintended consequence of leading to the formation of modern India. Many other British actions were plainly harmful to India. After the upheaval of the conflict in 1858, the British actively resisted demands for independence, created obstacles in the path of Indian industrialization, looked to India as a protected market for British goods and were not active in combating major calamities like famines and floods.

Specialists study the British rule in detail to highlight the economic exploitation of the imperialists and their racist attitudes. Once the East India Company seized control, it began paying for exports from India using the tax revenue. Some of these studies attribute the capital acquired by looting India and treating it as a protected market for British goods as the cause of even the industrial revolution in Britain. The advent of industrial revolution meant that very soon India had nothing to export and since local production was neither encouraged nor protected, the nation lost its competitive position in the comity of nations and slipped into extreme poverty. Most of these conclusions are properly researched scholastic analyses would certainly have some factual support.

Such analyses and conclusions are preferred because of the bitterness of colonial experience. In popular experience, the resentment of being a loser has been more influential than even the racial and condescending attitudes of the colonial masters. To admit that the failure of Indians to resist colonial rule was not due to treachery or disunity but the absurd world view of our countrymen is still extremely unpopular. The intellectual tradition in post independent India has been dominated by the Marxist world view. This is partly due to the unwillingness to accept the philosophy of the erstwhile colonial masters.

However, two key questions remain unanswered and unaddressed by these views. Firstly, actions such as by Bentinck and Macaulay mentioned above are significant steps towards creation of "MY India", representing reformation of the rules of society, questioning of tradition and open acceptance of the common human heritage and knowledge. What were the chances of such progress in the absence of the colonial intervention? Secondly, do we really have two distinct classes of actions of the British, one contributing to the emergence of modern India and the other to the destruction and impoverishment of Bharat?

It is very difficult for me to accept that Indians would have initiated the process of change without the whiplash of the colonial rule. One glance at India at independence is sufficient. There was universal agreement that with a few exceptions, the conditions in the "princely states" ruled by native hereditary rulers were far worse than even "British India". The rulers were more interested in acquiring a 200 carat diamond which could then be used as a paper weight or getting 340 Kg silver utensils made for storing "pure water from the Ganges". This problem of the underdevelopment in "states" as they were then called, worried and saddened the Indian leaders at the time of independence. Unfortunately, this reality of "native states" is now brushed under the rug to cater to "local pride".

So reformation without external dominance appears unlikely. Raja Ram Mohan Roy deserves as much or perhaps even more credit than William Bentinck for abolition of *sati*. But I venture to suggest that even this intellectual giant needed the support of the colonial power to break free of the bonds of tradition. The support and patronage of colonial rulers who were prepared to go a lot further in advocating modernization was useful for the first generation contributors to "MY India". One can contrast this with the unwillingness of the current democratically elected government to act against sections of contemporary India who are unwilling to accept modernity or abandon "tradition". Due to electoral compulsions, in the recent past, successive governments and the entire spectrum of political parties have bent over backwards to accommodate the most conservative and medieval segments of the society; the Muslim Mullahs, the Hindu Sants, and the conservative village elders who lead the Khap Panchayats.

It is not that there were no changes in Indian society before the British. One can name earlier saints who had tried to reform Hinduism. The names of Ramanuja, Chaitanya, and Guru Nanak spring to mind. But openness to ideas from outside the tradition has been very limited. These saints were no different from Christian monks trying to redefine

Christian society from within, a continuous process distinct from free questioning and challenging of tradition that has emerged following the European Renaissance in the 15th century. European Renaissance was a complex historical event and more the scholars study, the more complex it can appear to be. However, it does represent a clear departure, starting with about 1500, from the trends of the past. It emerged from an emphasis on the experimental method as a check before accepting traditional knowledge. The French historians of the 19th century named this Renaissance or rebirth as a mark of respect to the intellectual accomplishments of the ancient Greeks. The Indian or Bengali Renaissance, initiated around the year 1800 also represents a break with unquestioned acceptance of tradition and the acceptance from the common human heritage. Just as in Europe, advent of printing and easy dissemination of knowledge has a greater role than is often acknowledged.

It must be remembered that the Indian Renaissance did not occur when there was a surplus in trade, before the British became colonial masters. Many of the inventions that lead to the industrial revolution were invented in the early decades of the eighteenth century, even before India was colonized. Thus while the British may have used profits of trade in the 16th century to create the industrial revolution, India did not. The Indians did not properly invest in technological development when the country had a surplus in trade because unlike Europe, the attitudes that Renaissance represented had not taken root in India. The first scientific institution in Britain, the Royal Society was founded in 1660. The Indian Association For Cultivation Of Science was established in 1876. The Taj Mahal can be compared favorably with the St. Paul's Cathedral in London. Both were built around the same time. Nothing in eighteenth century India matches Newton's *Pricipia* which initiated modern science.

Turning to the second question raised above, how did the British simultaneously ruin Bharat while inaugurating the emergence of India,

most studies emphasize the direct loot and the tariff regimes that helped British exports and discouraged Indian industry. I see a major role for the cost of personnel required for setting up the infrastructure needed for India. What distinguishes today's India from the other recently independent poor countries are the institutions. Bureaucracy in India was known as the steel frame on which the administration depended. Even today, despite all the corruption and political interference, the situation is better than most of the other third world countries. The recruitment of proficient civil service depends on the educational institutions to train them. This is a chicken and egg conundrum. If there is no trained manpower there is no administration and if there is no administration there is no manpower. Most of the newly independent countries in Asia and Africa had to import this manpower to initiate the process. In India in 1800, this initiation was due to colonial officers and administrators who were "paid enough" for them to come to India to work and retire on their pensions and savings in England. The payments were of course from the taxes paid by Bharat. Thus the seeds of "MY India" were the cause of destruction of Bharat. There were no two distinct actions.

It is indeed depressing and a blow to our self respect as an ancient civilization to admit it. But it is extremely doubtful that India could have modernized itself without the sad episode of colonialism. At least part of the blame for the sad state of the third world countries that have achieved independence after the second world war rests with themselves. They are still struggling to accept the intellectual message of European Renaissance and the age of reason.

One has to distinguish between accepting the intellectual legacy of the European Renaissance and enlightenment and the obnoxious behavior of the colonial rulers. To accept that an Indian in the early British era was mostly backward looking and insular does not mean ignoring that the British participants were bigoted, racist idiots by contemporary standards. Despite the influence of Renaissance and the

age of reason, the Europeans could not overcome their racism. During the early twentieth century, they were not willing to accept that non-Europeans could be their equals. A significant portion still do not accept it. They could not accept that it was knowledge and not race that defined their superiority. Thus Woodrow Wilson, the American president made proposals affirming the right of self-determination of all peoples at the end of the first world war but limited its application only to European people. The Europeans had to experience the horrors of the second world war before they made the commitment to universal human rights. This is also the history of the Indian freedom movement as will be apparent in another of these essays.

1947

India became independent on August 15, 1947. The first prime minister of India, Jawahar Lal Nehru, called it India's tryst with destiny in his famous speech at the midnight of 14/15 August 1947. Two other events of that period give a melancholy tinge to the dawn of independence. One was the partitioning of the Indian subcontinent and the formation of an independent Pakistan. The other is a human tragedy. The death of an estimated 500,000 people in the riots and the migration of nearly ten times as many people as refugees in newly independent India and Pakistan.

To some Indians, the formation of Pakistan is a British crime on the motherland, division of "an *akhand* (Indivisible) Bharat", an extension of the British policy of divide and rule, a deliberate ploy to prove the failure of the Indians to govern themselves to which the Muslim fundamentalists were a willing ally. To others, the periodic wars between Pakistan and India and the seemingly intractable problem of Kashmir add to the human tragedies of death and displacement

of the partition. This leads to a nostalgic wish for a unified India. Most Indians agree that Britain brutally suppressed the independence movement, conceded to the inevitability of leaving India with poor grace and made every effort to ensure a failure of the new nation. Partition and the rights given to the "native rulers" to choose between India and Pakistan were part of these efforts. Two questions remain for speculation by every thinking Indian. Would India have been better off if independence was achieved much earlier, say after the first war of independence in 1858? Would India have been better off if partition had not occurred?

To answer these questions one has to evaluate the accomplishments of India since its independence and compare this with the history of other nation states. First, we will distinguish between a nation which can also refer to an ethnic or cultural group and "the state" which is the independent political entity. Emergence of what I call a modern nation state in this context is not similar in all countries. For example, France could claim to be a nation since 486 AD, but contemporary France is called the fifth republic which was established only in 1958. The first republic was proclaimed in 1792. Between successive republics, France was ruled by kings or was subjugated by a foreign power. The fourth republic was replaced by the fifth due to severe political disturbances.

In the British Isles, the emergence of a nation state was a gradual process of change from an absolute monarchy to the current constitutional one with the so called Glorious Revolution of 1688 defining the point at which balance of power finally shifted to the nation state. A war of independence resulted in the emergence of the United States of America (USA) in 1776. Revolutions have resulted in new political entities, for example in Cuba. Many nations were formed after the second world war when the European colonial powers gave independence to their colonies often as in India's case, in response to a freedom movement and more amicably in some later cases.

Even in India, as a matter of nationalist pride, it is common to harp on the earliest date at which the "nation" was mentioned in a written document. Thus, when an Indian talks about "Bharat" he can refer to the "*Bharata Varsha* or *Bharata Khanda*" in *puranic* literature which are at least two thousand years old. But we shall concentrate on the political entity and thus 15th August 1947 is the independence day. It remains the date of reference. "MY India" took another significant step forward when the constitution has been approved on 26th January 1950 and India became a republic. There have been 97 amendments to the constitution since then, but no major disruption of the democratic process. It has to be conceded that the declaration of emergency by Indira Gandhi during 1975-77 is an exception. Thus one has more than sixty years of progressive improvement of "MY India". As usual, I am ignoring the complaints of those alienated from it. This compares favorably even with most European nation states. Fascist rulers like Franco, Mussolini and Hitler and other dictatorial rulers of various European nations confirm that the success of western democracies is only contemporaneous to the much poorer, ill educated India.

In many of the other third world countries that emerged as independent nations after India, either right wing or the left wing dictatorships became the norm. As with most of the others, leaders of the newly independent India were largely influenced by Marxist ideas of exploitation and had very little faith in the capitalist system. This is not very surprising. While it is a favorite past time of arm chair thinkers to imagine what glories would have been unleashed if India had not followed the socialist path, it is unrealistic. The bitterness of the colonial experience, the inequality that is visible between the status of the colonies and the colonizers would never have permitted a democratic transition to a capitalist model. In 1776 the rallying cry of the colonists in what became the USA was "no taxation without representation". The rallying cry of the Indian freedom movement was "Quit India". For similar reasons, capitalist policies were implemented in newly independent third world countries only by dictators. Leftist poli-

cies were also implemented by dictatorships in many countries. A Marxist state is a dictatorship of the proletariat by definition. There is no consistent trend as regards the consequent economic prosperity or survival of the society. There are economic failures among both right wing and left wing dictatorships. Perhaps South Korea and Kampuchea represent the two extremes. One has reached a standard of living that is comparable to the European "first world" countries and has now accomplished a transition to a democratic society and the other lost a third of its population to internal genocide.

So what is unique about India's freedom movement and how is it relevant for the questions regarding partition and date of independence raised earlier? Why is India an almost unique exception sixty five years later? India might not have had the highest rate of growth but, it managed to survive as a functional democracy. As for the ideological orientation of its leaders, Jawahar Lal Nehru, was as much a socialist as any and openly said that his role was to save the people from imperialism and capitalism. His unwillingness to rule by force has often been attributed to the personality of Nehru. But I venture to suggest that behind Nehru's renunciation of force as a means of achieving desirable ends is the long shadow of the Mahatma. Indians take pride in the nonviolent and peaceful nature of the freedom movement under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi. The best example of his insistence on the "right means for the right ends" is response to violence in Chauri Chaura. He stopped his noncooperation movement in 1922 because the satyagrahees had set fire to a police station killing 22 policemen. Mostly people do not seem to realize the great impact this "spiritual" attitude on the subsequent history of India. I am not claiming that such an attitude is necessary. Merely that it helped in the context of India.

In contrast to Gandhi and Nehru, several thousand deaths during the "Direct Action Plan" did not deter the Muslim League in its demand for Pakistan. They probably justified this as merely "unfortu-

nate", just as many a Marxist ignores the death of millions under Stalin's rule in Russia or Mao's in China. The failure of the Pakistani leaders to even draft their constitution for nearly 25 years is a significant fact in my analysis of the events of 1947. It is not that a military dictatorship prevented the formation of a constitution in Pakistan. Rather the presence of strong groups unwilling to compromise and wanting to impose their own form of dictatorship facilitated the military dictator. Peaceful transfer of power between successive elected governments has recently occurred a few times in both Pakistan and Bangladesh. But the latest events in Bangladesh show how the democratic processes are still quite weak. Currently, Nepal has a similar difficulty to formulate a constitution because of a large Marxist group which once again does not abhor violence or a dictatorship.

The failure of the majority of the newly independent states to develop stable systems of governance is ultimately linked to the unwillingness to renounce force and coercion as options. Both leaders and the opposition are dictatorial in their actions and plans. In India, attempts at coercing the system to one's own point of view are of limited strength and except for the short duration during the emergency in 1975-77 did not disrupt the system. Unfortunately, it turns out that in the case of Muslims in the Indian subcontinent as also in most of these newly independent countries, ideas initiated by the European Renaissance and enlightenment have no strong roots. Without the colonial power, there is no encouragement for individuals with these views. The all important human intellectual accomplishments of the past four centuries were tarnished by their association with the bigoted, racist and financially costly colonial administration and rejected in toto.

So ultimately the answer to the questions becomes obvious. Indian independence in 1857 or success of the first war of Indian independence would have been a disaster. The emergence of a strong group of individuals with modern education and attitudes, with the ability to assimilate the common heritage of humanity and implement proper

policies was completely absent in that era. The events in Pakistan and even Bangladesh after its independence serve a warning that even in 1947, the strength of these people, who could make a sincere effort at nurturing the seeds of "MY India" planted by the British was quite small. Even in 1947 an independent unified India would have seen the domination of the "backward looking" groups just as it has occurred in our neighborhood. To put it bluntly the fundamentalists of the two dominant religions and various other groups with similar views would have either coalesced and transformed India into an earlier version of present day theocratic Iran or simply torn the country to pieces as happened in Yugoslavia. The primary reason for the survival and the success of "MY India", limited as the successes have been is the limited scope for such forces in the smaller domain available.

So while I celebrate the independence of "MY India" I am sad and also ashamed. I am sad to know that "MY India" would not have existed but for the human tragedy of 1947 that caused so much human anguish. I am ashamed to realize that a bigoted colonial administrator was necessary to safeguard the seeds of "MY India". I am sad that a vast section of my countrymen continues to be so ignorant even today of the necessity of the ideas that emerged outside India and of critical examination rather than unquestioned acceptance of tradition or ideology. What is much worse, many of these ignorant countrymen are so arrogant and inflexible.

Hindu Renaissance In British India

There are several attributes of the modern western democracies that "MY India" shares to some degree. These include the overthrow of servile and unquestioned acceptance of tradition and religion, accepting the government as the sole authority for use of force or punishment, peaceful resolution of all internal disagreements through democratic means, accepting experimental verification as the cornerstone of all knowledge and most importantly unwillingness to accept the use of violence as a proper response to the expression of any opinion. The western societies attribute these developments to the European Renaissance and the Age of Reason a process that has started five hundred years ago. In the same vein, the development of critical thinking in India, in the early years of the nineteenth century was labeled by scholars as the Bengal or Indian Renaissance.

The name "renaissance" was considered apt for this transformation by the French historians of mid nineteenth century as they saw this as a rebirth, a return to the glory that was classical Greece. This is

actually more of emotion than reality. Ancient Greece was a slave society and despite the great philosophers, many of the features of modern democracies outlined above did not apply. Similarly, neither pre-Muslim nor pre-British Indian societies were earlier incarnations of "MY India".

The transformation of Europe into the present liberal democracy was very slow and punctuated by large scale violence. When one looks at the inflexibility of the conservative Christian Evangelical in contemporary American politics or the xenophobic, fascist groups surviving in contemporary Europe, one realizes that this is an ongoing process and is by no means complete. The so called Renaissance was merely the initiation of a process. Along the way, these societies went through phases of large scale violence. African Blacks were subjected to inhuman violence in the slave trade. In most European colonies, treatment of the native peoples was almost as bad. Native populations in the Americas and Australia were subjected to a genocide. Sectarian violence between Christian sects was rampant in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. The French Revolution in the late eighteenth century, the holocaust under Fascists and the gulag under the communists involved a horrendous number of native European casualties. The acceptance of "reason" has not been peaceful at all!

Progress leading to the realization of a liberal democracy always begins with individuals. Technology and communication help in propagating the ideas for change. This is the reason printing was a major trigger for Renaissance. However, the key to successful transformation of the society is the formation of a large enough group that supports these changes. Only such a group can survive in a hostile environment. In Europe the greatest examples of individuals triggering changes are Galileo in the scientific side and Martin Luther in the Church. The Catholic Church could only jail Galileo. It could not suppress the dissemination of his views. The emergence of alternate Church groups under the influence of Martin Luther initially led to large scale

sectarian violence. But this ultimately convinced most to accept the freedom of the individual and democratic resolution of issues.

While I do not see post Renaissance European society as a blueprint of "MY India", I do feel that the Bengal or Indian Renaissance of the early nineteenth century is largely a Hindu Renaissance. In the subsequent two hundred years, the Hindu society has transformed itself quite spectacularly and surprisingly, with a minuscule fraction of the violence that characterized the European transformation. Equally surprisingly, resentment of the vanquished and subjugated Hindu in accepting the advice of the victorious Europeans had been muted till the dominance of socialistic thought in post independent India.

Resentment of the victors is often very strong and persists even when it harms one's own self. To give a contemporary example, part of the misery and certainly it is only a part and not the whole of it, of the Black and Native Americans today is their stubbornness in retaining or encouraging ancient tribal identities, values and practices. The history of the world is a witness to the limitations of tribal as opposed to family based lifestyles, even in agrarian societies not to speak of industrial or post-industrial societies. These self inflicted wounds caused by the tribal identity as a replacement for functional families are adding to the misery of these groups.

Questions emerge from the above claim that what has occurred in India is largely a Hindu Renaissance. Why do I claim that the Muslims, the second largest group in the Indian subcontinent did not participate in this Renaissance? Why was the transformation so rapid and relatively free of violence? Why did the Hindus participate in this transformation without major resentment against the colonizing authority? To answer such questions one has to distinguish between selective acceptance of technology and what I am claiming as the key component of "MY India", the acceptance of the intellectual lessons of universal human progress.

There are two facets of the modern advanced societies. One is the liberal democratic life style. The other is the technology and wealth. It is common to emphasize wealth as the consequence of "loot" or "exploitation" and then explain away the liberal society as the consequence of economic progress. Many societies have tried to accept the technology while resisting the "alien way of life" and even more strongly resist challenging traditional knowledge with "reason". The modern Islamic terrorists accept modern technology very much like the Native Americans who rapidly accepted both the horse and the carbine in their wars with the white settlers. Other examples of selective acceptance include pre-revolutionary Russia and modern Saudi Arabia.

The most spectacular example of the failure of this piecemeal acceptance and resistance to the core message of Renaissance is Japan. Japan accepted every European technological skill in the late years of the nineteenth century. The result was the rapid emergence of a powerful nation that could defeat Imperial Russia in 1905. But the Japanese were selective in the use of reason, continued the traditional values and remained a "tribal" society right up to their defeat in the second world war. Perhaps Japan joined Fascist Germany largely because of the similarities of the attitudes. The feudal, tribal Japanese soldier who was willing to die for the Emperor and to commit hara-kiri or ceremonial suicide rather than surrender was matched by the fanatic commitment of the German soldier to his Fuhrer.

The situation of the Hindus has been quite the reverse. The major impact of Renaissance has been the reformation of the religion. It started with Raja Ram Mohan Roy and the abolition of the inhuman practice of *sati*. It progressed through the intellectual redefinition of Hinduism by Vivekananda. It led to active efforts at modifying the Hindu marriage act. It led to efforts for eliminating untouchability. In many cases there have been efforts to justify the changes by reinterpreting Hindu scriptures. True, there have been Hindu saints of the past who tried to reform Hinduism from within. But in the last two

hundred years, there has been a significant group of Hindus who simply advocated change because of the resonance with a "humane" life and not from tradition. Most importantly these changes occurred well before the emergence of the modern "elite" with their western habits and life styles. For example westernization of women's dress is a much more recent phenomenon. Most of those who advocated change from Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar to Mahatma Gandhi were not overtly western.

This is not to ignore the unfinished state of the progress. One cannot lose sight of the misery of caste based suppression in contemporary rural India, the recent instigation of violence by the Khap Panchayats or the militant Hindutva of the Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Some of the recent setbacks to the improvement of "MY India" are the result of the deep seated resentment against the European victors. Some of the failures of the Indian state to resist communal forces are the consequence of the democratic society that we have. Unfortunately, while many groups participate in the Indian democracy, they are not willing to totally forgo violence and coercion. Contrast this with the religious right in the USA who may strongly oppose abortion because of religious convictions of the sacredness of life but do not sympathize with abortion clinic bombers. While they lament the decision of the majority, they are committed to work within the democratic decision making process. The Khap Panchayats and the Sangh Parivar, very much like the Muslim fundamentalists do not show the same respect to democratic processes. They are selective and accept democracy only when it suits them.

More importantly, with all the limitations of practice, clearly the Hindu society has made efforts to reformulate itself in the light of the entire human experience and there is little doubt of the transformation. The resentment of aping the victors was muted possibly because of the support of the colonial masters. This ensured that by the time of independence modernization has taken root and has not been confined

to isolated individuals. Two other factors contributed. In a thousand years of Muslim rule, the Hindus have rarely won a major battle or reversed the spread of Islam except briefly under the Marathas in the aftermath of Nadir Shah's looting of the Moghul treasury. This must have certainly rankled and many saw modernization as a necessity to acquire the much aspired power over the society. During the era of Islamic dominance, transformation meant renouncing the Hindu heritage in its entirety. With modernization, it was possible to retain some part of the heritage which was perhaps emotionally more satisfying. Secondly Hinduism, despite the nomenclature introduced by the British was never one religion. The caste differences were crisscrossed by innumerable mutually antagonistic interpretations, philosophies and practices. Thus accepting another modern interpretation was perhaps no novelty.

While the claim about there being a Hindu Renaissance will be generally accepted, even as there would be questions challenging some of the statements made above, the claim that there has been no equivalent renaissance in the Muslim community will be resented and challenged. The intellectuals of India, with their Marxist leanings, advance all kinds of sociological reasons for the sympathy exhibited by the contemporary Muslims of India towards Islamist interpretation of many issues. It is claimed that the "poor uneducated masses" are easily misled into agitating against books like "Satanic Verses" or "cartoons of Prophet Mohammad".

But one has to be simply blind not to see the similarity of the historical descriptions of European experience in the seventeenth and eighteenth century to attitudes of contemporary Muslims in India. An overwhelming majority of the Muslim Ummah do not resist modernization of the technology or skills, but do not accept personal reasoning as more important than tradition. Even in contemporary Islamic societies outside India, modernization beyond technology is resented. Every attempt is made to justify or impose the scripture. Fundamen-

talist Islam is not being thrust down the throats of the unwilling majority. Nor is it being reluctantly accepted by the poor masses along with financial help sponsored by petrodollars. It is being welcomed by a majority even when they reside in advanced western societies. Independent voices questioning the tradition or making independent interpretation are isolated and cast out of the Ummah. There is large scale violence between the Sunnis and the Shias. All these mirror the attitudes of Christian sects in post Renaissance Europe. This extends to even small details. As in contemporary Islamic societies, during the earlier era, there was widespread resistance to acceptance of "interest paid to deposits" in the European Christian societies.

Clearly some kind of consolidation of the individual voices of change is necessary for transforming the society. In its absence, the resistance of Islamic societies to modernization is not surprising. The pride in a society that till the nineteenth (in the case of the Ottoman Empire till the start of the twentieth) century could resist the Europeans and mostly an independent contributor to human progress contributed to this resistance to change. All this contrasts with the Hindu Renaissance initiated by a willingness to learn lessons from the rest of the world and perhaps seeing this as a necessity to reverse the failures of a thousand years. Not very surprisingly, there is a significant part of the contemporary Hindu society that wants only to accept the technology and not the mores of modernity and not very surprisingly attributes all past failures to treachery and all human achievements to their own culture.

Why Hindus Never Won

I think that almost everyone in the world has a major query about India. The western world wonders how a such a poor and largely illiterate country has accepted and implemented liberal democracy for a continuous span longer than what France has accomplished. The countries of South America must surely wonder why they have not managed this despite becoming free nations even before the first war of Indian independence in 1857. The third world wonders what lesson they should learn from the Indian experience. Even China must be privately wondering if they should accept something new, two thousand years after they accepted the teachings of the Buddha.

As I try to articulate my own views about India's past and present as a prelude to my advice for the progress of "MY India", I wonder why for more than five hundred years since Prithviraj Chauhan lost in 1192 to the Maratha victories after the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, no Hindu king or army had ever won a major battle or reversed the establishment of a Muslim kingdom.

Amartya Sen famously said that two democracies do not go to war with one another. I feel that the reverse is equally true. Two kings (or sultans or rajahs) were always at war. "MY India" is a democratic entity and more importantly is built on the common heritage of mankind, which enables the societies to be organized peacefully without relying on kings. It has no emotional bonds with kings and kingship, either Hindu or Muslim. However, this question is relevant since a vast amount of vitriol is expressed by partisan Hindu groups about this facet of Indian history.

Even trained historians (not merely Hindu partisans) would question the generalization that the Hindus never won. Based on their scholastic study, they weave a rich tapestry of Hindu kings who accepted the suzerainty of the Moghuls, of the Muslim commanders in Hindu armies and consider my generalization either misguided or a secret part of the Hindu partisan argument. Unfortunately, sometimes this nuanced analysis of Muslim rule in India is overemphasized, a well meaning but misguided response to the partisan Hindu madness. For all the complexity, the reality is much closer to my simplification than these scholars would agree.

Muslim rule east of the Indus river started with the defeat of Prithviraj Chauhan in 1192. The first Muslim sultanate in South India, The Bahmani sultanate was in place by 1347, less than one hundred and fifty years later. The mighty Vijayanagar empire established in 1336 ruled a large portion of the southern part of the peninsula, but could only resist further southward expansion of the Bahmani Muslim rule and the border remained more or less fixed. In 1565 the Vijayanagar empire was defeated and survived as a weaker entity. Eventually, it was the Sunni Moghul Empire under Aurangzeb which defeated the Shia rule of the Bahmanis, by then divided into five independent Muslim kingdoms and replaced them with the Nizam of Hyderabad who ruled till independence in 1947. This is the history of regular rulers, not invaders such as Malik Kafur or Mohammed Ghaznavi who very

much like Timur and Nadir Shah went to war for treasure and did not rule the areas they attacked. So my question is reasonable and is independent of the question of how Hindu subjects of Muslim rule fared.

Since the professional historian disdains to answer the obvious question of why Hindus, despite fighting almost continually, never reversed the gains made by Islamic rulers, the amateurs, many of them partisan have a field day. The most common refrain is that the Hindu kings were victims of treason and disunity among themselves. This does not make any sense since the life of every king and sultan was an unending series of wars. A short description of, for example the long reign of emperor Akbar in any standard book of history will list a major war for every year, often with other Muslim rulers. Since there was no democratic transfer of power, treason and disunity were the automatic consequences of normal human ambition.

Another bizarre claim attributes almost superhuman notion of chivalry to the Hindu kings who spared the lives of the vanquished enemies who returned to fight, win and kill them. But the history is replete with examples of Muslim rulers who converted the defeated kings and sent them to rule their old kingdoms. That is how the famous Vijayanagar empire was founded. The brothers Harihara and Bukka, were converted to Islam and sent to rule their old kingdom but they reconverted back to Hinduism. Similarly, it is claimed that due to their code of chivalry, Hindus would not attack the civilians. The expectation is perhaps that Kalinga war would have been forgotten. Other more amusing amateur explanations claim superior strength to the invaders due to genetics or even their "non-vegetarianism". Another would lay the blame on the Hindu caste system. The lower castes would see no reason to fight along with their oppressors. But most Hindu kings at least in south India were not forward caste *khsatriya* warriors. The problem with all such explanations is the ease with which one uncovers counter examples.

Just as we have accepted cruelty and incessant warfare as the attribute of all kings, we should ignore these attempts at trying to attribute the consistent failure of the Hindus to their personal character. So the explanation has to rest with some organizational and technological advantage that the Muslim rulers or armies enjoyed. A slightly more sophisticated claim is that the Arabian horses required for a strong cavalry had to be imported from the Arabian peninsula and this trade was tightly controlled in favor of the Muslims. The Bahmani Sultans of south India were called *ashwapatis* (horse rulers) and the Vijayanagar Kings, the *narapatis* (human rulers) reflecting the emphasis on cavalry in the first and the infantry in the second case.

Actually this guess masks a greater reality. Assuming the importance of horses, why import them from Arabia? After domestication, horses were never captured from the wild for human use. In contrast, even till the twentieth century, elephants required for either warfare or forest work were wild animals captured from the forest and then trained. A domesticated horse is a special breed. Thus the dependence on imported horses reflects the inability of the Hindus to establish proper breeding programs for horses. This is even more important than the simple issue of whether lack of horses was the true cause of the Hindu failure. The resistance to learn how to accomplish an all important job is in my opinion a consequence of the very strong oral tradition. Even more than the caste system, the most singular feature of the Hindu society was the oral tradition.

In India, knowledge was primarily maintained as an oral tradition. The written book was only an aid to the oral learning and transmission of knowledge. Learning by oral tradition was highly rated in ancient India. Obviously the display of an enormous amount of knowledge (Or what seems to be so!) from the memory by an individual would have highly impressed the rulers. This tradition ensured that every book, be it on mathematics, economics, sex or horse grooming was written as poems which were more suitable for oral transmission.

This tradition restricted the availability of knowledge to those who had the resources to make the effort to learn, usually the affluent and forward castes. More importantly, alteration of the knowledge to include a new experience would be difficult. Not only that, if the experience was of the low caste workers, incorporation would be strongly resisted.

Thus the key reason for the dismal performance of the Hindu rulers in resisting the Muslim invasion may perhaps have been the mode of knowledge accumulation and transmission across generations. Yes, most tribal societies also have an oral tradition. But the Hindus continued this tradition, even as the civilization transformed into an agrarian medieval society ruled by kings, to the point when this was counterproductive. Just as European Renaissance was triggered by the newly introduced printing technology, Hindu transformation started with the movement away from the oral tradition helped by the printing presses introduced by the Europeans in the later years of the eighteenth century.

Oral Tradition

The Beauty And The Burden

Humanity developed the art of writing rather recently. Modern humans have emerged from Africa less than 70,000 years ago and managed to occupy all presently habitable areas of the globe in perhaps a few thousand years. The oldest forms of writing are certainly less than 10,000 years old and many societies did not develop writing even till the twentieth century. It stands to reason that the spoken word, the primary difference between humans and all other animal species would have been the basis for communication across generations through an oral tradition. In all ancient societies, oral knowledge would have impressed the unlettered. Rote learning has the ability to create a false impression of knowledge, something that modern educators vainly try to detect and supplant with "understanding".

Even after the development of writing, absence of printing and difficulties in reproduction of texts meant that universal literacy had no great attraction. Every civilization had to supplement their limited written documentation with oral communication. In this context, how justified is it to categorize the oral tradition as the most significant

feature of the Hindu civilization? So what is unique about the oral tradition of India? Why is it both a beauty to admire and a burden at the same time?

There are many indications of the importance of oral tradition among the inhabitants of India. The first is the surprising fact that in Indian languages, the only words for pen, ink and paper (like *kalam*, *syahi* and *kagaz* in Hindi) are actually Persian words. More recently words from European languages like English were added. Conservative Sanskrit which does not "import" words from other languages does not even have equivalent words. One has to make do with a *lekhini* or an implement to write and *patra* or leaf, signifying the rather laborious and inefficient way of making marks on palm leaves.

Equally important is the domination of poetry over prose writing in almost all Indian languages till the advent of printing and European influence in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the huge corpus of Sanskrit literature for example, there are only a handful of prose works. Whether the subject was mathematics, astrology or even breeding of horses, the material was always cast in poems. While occasional sentences of prose were employed to bridge the poems, it was rarely the dominant means of conveying either information or displaying artistic talent. In view of the innate musical sense of the humans, it is much more easier to commit to memory poetry rather than prose,

To fully appreciate the link between dominance of oral tradition and poetry, one has to learn the complexity of the poetic structures in India literature. Poems in any language have some rules of construction, like length of each line and rhyming syllables at the end. But the poems in Indian languages have a much more intricate structure. This is based on the concept of long and short "*aksharas*". It is better to use the term "*akshara*" in Indian languages. This refers to a clearly distinguishable sound that can be a combination of vowels and consonants. In Indian poems, these "*aksharas*" are classified as long

and short. The length is indicated by the "*matra*" or duration required for it to be uttered. This is "*laghu*" for a short sound and "*deergha*" for a long sound. The English concept of a syllable is not an exact equivalent. In English the words, "the" and "thee" are both said to be of one syllable. Each can be written as one "*akshara*" but in poetic structure, "the" has one *matra* and is a "*laghu*" but "*thee*" has two *matras* and is designated as a "*deergha*", though both are words of one syllable.

Anything written will consist of a series "*aksharas*", short and long. There can obviously be many permutations and combinations. For example, in the most common Sanskrit poetic structure, the "*anushtup*", there are four lines, each of 8 "*aksharas*". The fifth "*akshara*" in each line is short while the sixth is long. In the first and third lines, the seventh is also long while in the second and fourth lines it is short. This ensures that there is a musical intonation of the poems as they are read aloud.

An amazing number of permutations of these short and long sounds have been enumerated and used in Indian poetry. Modern poets question the utility of these constraints and consider freedom from restraint, a basic necessity for creativity. The complex rules of construction that have been accepted, even in the simplest of the accepted "*chandas*" or forms of the poem have not however inhibited the creativity in the ancient Indian literature. Impromptu composition of poems "*ashu kavita*" as it is called, was highly respected before the advent of the modern era of Indian poetry. All the complex rules of prosody were strictly followed even in these extempore compositions.

Apart from amazement at this creativity, the minutely controlled structures of poems are viewed merely as a whimsical attribute of Indian traditional literature. But such controls serve a very useful purpose when the emphasis is on oral display of erudition and communication of knowledge. It is so much easier to detect errors and correct poor quality written records on palm leaf manuscripts. In many manu-

scripts the vowels were not written down since a trained reader could reconstruct the original, from the rules governing the structure and a dictionary of known words. Such reconstruction of ancient texts is a daily staple of modern scholars in their study of ancient literature of most Indian languages.

Another indication of the dominance of the oral tradition is the nature of the Indian scripts. The differences between the scripts of modern Indian languages such as Telugu and Hindi are very striking. However, the records maintained by the Indian National Museum comparing the stone and metal inscriptions of different periods show the common origin of all modern Indian scripts. Indian scripts are once again unique. They are not as complex as the Chinese writing. An educated Chinese knows and uses some 4,000 symbols. The Indian scripts are also not as simple as the alphabets of modern European languages which employ about 30 independent symbols for consonants and vowels. These in turn differ from the middle Eastern scripts like Arabic where the vowels have minimal symbols.

The Indian "*varna mala*" as the alphabet is called, has elaborate rules by which the basic symbol for a consonant is modified by vowels and more importantly other consonants. The rules of prosody mentioned above apply to the final modified symbol which defines a proper sound or "*akshara*". For example the "Shree" employed in Hindi as a replacement for "Mr." is written as a single symbol "श्री". The uniquely India concept of "*akshara*" is shared by all modern Indian languages and their scripts once again pointing to a common origin. In view of the ability to uniquely write complex sounds and the large number of vowels and consonants, Indian languages are largely phonetic and there is no concept of accent. Tamil is a unique exception in that a single symbol represents multiple consonants.

But writing this elaborate script on palm leaves using sharp pointers was difficult and error prone, particularly since the educated

disdained to perform this menial work! The advent of modern printing was necessary for superseding the emphasis on oral tradition. Incidentally, the fact that printing was known in China at least a few hundred years before it was introduced into Europe is accepted. No one seems to correlate this with the limited utility of printing when the script needs thousands of symbols. In some sense, printing triggered Renaissance in Europe but did not influence China in such a big way because of the different script employed. But printing did have a huge impact on Indian languages.

The tendency of the Hindu scriptures to be turned into "*sutras*" or a collections of aphorisms, (short statements usually of a few words) that need to be interpreted with the help of a teacher is another indicator of the importance of the oral communication of knowledge. The divine stature of the "*guru*" or teacher is another hint.

Nothing illustrates both the Hindu penchant for organizing knowledge and at the same time communicating it primarily through oral tradition as classical Indian music. On one side an elaborate theory of music was developed. The basic constituent of classical music in India is a "*raga*". Shorn of all fine details, a "*raga*" is a rendering by a musician confining himself to between 5 and 7 specified notes from among the 12 musical notes that are generally accepted to be pleasing to the ear. In a typical performance, established compositions, usually devotional, are embellished by the impromptu creativity of the performer. In reality, all permutations and combinations possible in such a selection are not used in popular "*ragas*". But all permutations are claimed to be "theoretically possible" and listed in the so called theory along with a lot of mystic comments and identification of gods associated with these notes.

In practice however, the popular melodious "*ragas*" employ notes which are moderately spaced. In rendering the "*raga*", three or four consecutive notes are not employed. More interestingly, all the

notes selected in one “*raga*” may be also permitted for a second. For example, the second “*raga*” may have an extra note. But no singer or a serious listener confuses one for the other. More often than not, a trained musician, after listening to a few notes of the extempore improvisation, is able to identify not merely the “*raga*” but even the specific composition that will be performed. The inflections and mode of singing “*ragas*” cannot be learned by reading the theory. Unlike Western Classical Music, one cannot perform the music by following a written record. For the same reason, symphony or coordinated playing of multiple instruments is not preferred. Notwithstanding the many books written hundreds of years ago, once again in poetry, one learns by direct oral transmission from the teacher.

All in all, both the oral traditions of music and literature in India are amazingly beautiful creations. The ability to be creative in the presence of many precisely defined rules of selection and prohibition is truly astounding. The imagination that conceptualized the possibilities of virtually infinite number of “*ragas*” and poetic structures has to be appreciated. The magnitude of the orally communicated knowledge is also astounding. Merely the core of the Vedas, the so called *samhita* or “*sruti*” (the heard) constitutes some 90,000 lines of poetry. The associated Vedic texts also called “*smriti*” (the remembered) is mostly in prose, but is at least equal in length. The names “*sruti*” and “*smriti*” themselves indicate the oral tradition. The major religious texts, ranging from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata to the 18 *puranas* constitute a million lines of poetry. That a small segment of the society, consisting mainly of adult brahmin males could maintain a tradition of such magnitude has to be accepted as a thing of beauty and wonder, even when one recognizes the many negative features and consequences of the oral tradition.

Certainly, the oral tradition helped the adult male brahmins in largely locking out the rest of the population from the source of knowledge. Apart from the social stratification, the reliance on a predomi-

nantly oral approach ensured that while appearing to be knowledgeable and wise, the "wisdom" had very little practical utility. There was extreme difficulty in altering the knowledge to bring it into balance with practical experience.

The severity of this limitation is exemplified what are called as "*kavi samayas*" or similes employed in poetry. These could never be questioned or challenged. But they show an utter disdain for reality. One example would suffice. It was an accepted truism that an elephant would swallow a "wood apple" whole, miraculously digest the contents and still excrete the whole wood apple unbroken. This is scientifically absurd and it is easy to confirm that it is wrong. However, no one has apparently bothered to verify the truism by breaking a wood apple after it was excreted! So, the comparison would be employed by the poet, secure in the knowledge that the meaning would be understood by the reader. But aside from being an idiosyncrasy, it illustrates the stifling environment of the inflexible oral tradition.

If the negative aspects were only these historical situations, the failure of Hindu kings to win wars and the deeply divided Hindu society, the oral tradition could have been ignored in the present work, concerned more with developing a practical path towards a modern "MY India". Unfortunately, the great oral tradition in India has several major negative consequences for "MY India". The first of these is the unjustified claims of greatness ascribed to this knowledge in diverse areas including science and mathematics. These are used as a basis for supporting the idea of the "golden era" of pre-Muslim India. The second is a great strand of contemporary scholarship that stresses the sectarian conflicts in India, most importantly between the various Hindu castes and between the "Aryan" and "Dravidian" or indigenous peoples. Partly this is a reaction to the inhuman caste system. Partly however it is an attempt to counter the attempts at portraying Indian history as destruction of the golden era of Hindu India by Muslim rule. Consequently this scholarship seeks to magnify the importance of each and

every example of composite Hindu-Muslim culture and portraying a glorious India that was wrecked only by western imperialism and colonialism.

The few words of praise bestowed here on the beauty of the oral tradition of India should not be construed as any kind of justification for its knowledge content. As with everything one needs to have a very realistic assessment of the truth. Exaggerated accounts even with the best of intentions are not accepted here. So we need to look at the broad picture of the oral tradition. Do the claims of Vedic mathematics for example have any validity? Are the attempts to flesh out Indian history using this literature sensible? Does the tradition really reflect an Aryan-Dravidian schism? Is the content of the oral tradition largely fictional? We shall reflect on these over the next few pieces before ringing down the curtain on the past of "MY India"

Jantar Mantar

The Jantar Mantar is an "Indian Astronomical Observatory". A couple of these, constructed in the eighteenth century have survived in Jaipur and Delhi. The words are derived from the Sanskrit words "*yantra*" or instrument and "*mantra*", usually "words with mystical religious significance". It is claimed that contextually "*mantra*" is a formula. While the name "calculating instrument" is satisfying and the Jantar Mantar is invoked as an instance of Indian science, the reality is very humbling. To me it has always been a grand example of the failure of Indians to accept from contemporary human heritage and the praise bestowed on this anachronism a representative example of the hyperbole about ancient Indian greatness.

A few words about development of astronomy in Europe in the period before the construction of Jantar Mantar are in order. Copernicus showed in 1542 that the interpretation of astronomical observations made over the previous two thousand or more years can be made much simpler if one assumes that the planets are revolving around the sun rather than the earth as was assumed by the dominant astro-

nomical school of Ptolemy. Starting with 1574, Tycho Brahe collected data of astronomical observations accurate to about one minute of arc using simple moving mechanical instruments such as sextants, and quadrants for measuring the angular positions of stars and planets with respect to the horizon, not with telescopes but with the naked eye. Kepler used this data to infer the three famous laws of planetary motion by about 1620. Newton, described in his *Principia*, published in 1687 the commonality between the movement of planets and of cannon balls and thus laid the foundation for modern physics.

Now let us consider the rigid structures built in the Jantar Mantar. The numbers of relevance for astronomy (or for that matter, astrology) are only the relative angles between the fixed stars and the planets. These can never be accurately determined from the numerals on curved scales that are present on these instruments. The planets as well as the stars are continuously traveling in the sky as the night progresses. The stars and planets will align on these random scales only for a brief instant every night and then these numbers have to be transformed into actual angles in the zodiac by empirical relations. Thus even in principle, these structures are not very useful for determining the positions of planets (even for astrology).

Then one has at these observatories various sun dials to determine the local noon and the sun time presumably at various locations. Clocks in the eighteenth century were far more accurate time keepers. The saddest part about the Jantar Mantar is the information provided by the library in the Jaipur city palace. The king who had got these monuments built had a copy of Newton's *Principia*! Rather than learn from the best, he tried to learn from tradition. A great example of my pet peeve that Indians of the era did not have the key ingredient required for "MY India".

Thus a simple critical examination from common sense and basic science raises many questions about claims about Indian sci-

ence. To be sure scholarly accounts about Jantar Mantar rarely make wild claims. But the wild claims are very common and the experts see no benefit in challenging them. There are too many crackpots and there is little professional respect in proving them wrong. The goal of present writing however is to make the average reader realize his own potential for critical examination.

In general the "truth value" as opposed to the "beauty value" of the vast literature that formed the basis for the oral tradition varies. Some claims are real, supported by the scholars, but an important caveat is often missing. The decimal numbers of India certainly transformed European mathematics, once the idea gained entry through the Arabs. With this exception, ideas of Indian scholars and mathematicians did not influence the development of the science in Europe. Thus Arya Bhatta may have known about the true nature of the "*Rahu*" and the "*Ketu*" the demons designated as the cause of solar and lunar eclipses. Astronomically these are the locations in space where the orbit of the earth around the sun and the orbit of the moon around the earth intersect. But his knowledge influenced neither Indian literature nor Copernicus. There may be occasional references to a sun centric system in Indian mathematical works, but even the astrologers in India continued to use the Ptolemaic methods for calculating their almanacs right till the modern era. Indian poetry and literature continued to use the imagery from the ancient mythology. The ideas of Galileo and Newton owed nothing to Indian authors.

Similarly the famous Pythagoras theorem may have been "known" to ancient Indians as it was possibly known to the builders of the Egyptian pyramids. But there is a difference between knowing that this theorem is true for a large number of observations and proving that it is true for all imaginable right angled triangles. Only the ancient Greeks developed a "theorem" to achieve such a proof. Each step of the proof of a theorem proceeds logically from a set axioms or intu-

itively obvious claims about the nature of a point, a straight line, etc. The approach of the ancient Indian mathematicians was more empirical and they never "proved theorems".

Claims about "Vedic" mathematical formulae for solving complex problems are more amusing than real. These are so called "*sutras*" culled from the ancient texts. By themselves, they are too cryptic to understand. Consider a couple of typical examples such as "One More than the One Before" and "All from nine and the Last from ten". Analogies are drawn between these and multiplications or divisions of large numbers. No amount of meditation about these "*sutras*" can reveal these "simple ways of solving difficult problems". There is no justification for the analogy nor any explanation of why these specific numerical problems are so important as to merit these "*sutras*" being codified. Clearly, these examples are first "discovered" recently by ordinary mathematics before the analogies are drawn as evidence for the greatness of the ancient scholars. This is very similar to the game of finding hidden codes in Shakespearean plays revealing the name of the true author or trying to find allegorical meaning in fiction. With ingenuity a very large number of plausible and not so plausible codes and allegories can always be found. But how does one justify them?

Claims based on actual products of ancient India are more credible. Surely the Iron Pillar, presently located near the Qutab Minar in Delhi that has not rusted in a thousand years is a great example of Indian technology. What has been internationally praised as Damascus steel is of Indian origin. India was a great exporter of steel in the ancient world. It is true that the Royal Society of London had actually sponsored projects to scientifically investigate Indian iron and steel products in the seventeenth century. But will the technology of the iron pillar be useful if we manage to reproduce it today? Unlikely because iron that can be protected by paint would be more useful if it can be produced at a lower cost. The Iron pillar is formed by forging or

joining small pieces of hot iron, a labor intensive and extremely costly process. In any case, painfully, the hidden secrets of this technology are not found in the "beautiful, artistic texts" we are discussing.

Some claims, even about the "great ancient Indian technology" are once again myths. A great example is Dacca muslin. Every Indian child is reared on the tragic story of how the colonial masters cut off the fingers of the weavers, since the British machine manufactured cloth was far inferior to the muslin and could not compete with it. The famous cloth is claimed to be 1400-1800 counts in the warp alone. This is the number of threads per inch in one direction of the cloth. It is claimed that several yards of the cloth could pass through the ring of a ladies little finger and that thirty yards of the material weighed a mere ten grams. It is claimed that the weavers had to work for as long as six months to weave muslin.

Many of these hyperboles are absurd. If there are 1400 warp counts of thread, each thread has to be about 20 microns in diameter. Unfortunately, the human eye cannot distinguish anything smaller than about ten times that diameter. A superfine silk like Chiffon weigh about 35 grams per square meter. For thirty yards of muslin to weigh ten grams, the thickness of the cloth must be about one hundredth the thickness of silk. The strength that such a thin membrane would have, even if one could be made, can be imagined. If muslin required six months of labor, it cannot be for mass consumption and would be naturally very costly. Muslin, at least of this superfine variety could not have dominated the exports of India nor competed with machine produced cloth for mass consumption. Prior to the industrial revolution, India exported calico or coarse cotton cloth.

The purpose of these statements is merely to bring our vision of ancient India to the ground level. It is worth repeating that India till the later half of the eighteenth century could hold its own with any contemporary civilization. In art, architecture, literature or science In-

dia was as good as the best in the world. Every civilization has some aspects which are superior to its contemporaries. The Indian number system is superior to the Roman numerals. The systematic Greek geometry is better than the more empirical approaches in other civilizations. To study these as intellectual curiosities and historical facts is completely natural. But to ascribe to one's own civilization outrageous superiority is a big mistake.

To ignore our own contribution to the decline of our competitive position is equally silly. The resistance to learn from the common human heritage accumulated since the fifteenth century European Renaissance delayed the emergence of a modern India. Maybe this was inevitable under the circumstances prevailing then. It may be excusable, but to simply blow the accomplishments of ancient Indians, all out of proportion and blame the colonial masters for our current state is silly and more importantly counter productive. There is often a claim that those who ignore history are bound to repeat it. We will see how useful this claim itself is in due course. This blowing of our own trumpet could almost be ignored as unimportant. But biased interpretations of "the oral tradition" are often responsible for opposing the agenda of "MY India". A more honest assessment of other aspects of this tradition is necessary.

Dravidians, Aryans And Indians

One fact about India cannot be questioned. All the major regional languages in India belong to either the Indo-Aryan or the Indo-Dravidian families. The languages of the northern part of India, Hindi, Punjabi, Bengali are Indo-Aryan as are Oriya and Marathi, spoken by people in the northern part of peninsular India. The four languages of the southernmost part, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam are Indo-Dravidian. Most of the north Indian languages emerged from the various dialects of an earlier Indo-Aryan language called Prakrit. Curiously, while the scripts of the Indo-Dravidian languages are considered distinct from the northern ones, a glance at the historical evolution of scripts in the Indian National Museum from the Ashokan rock edicts to stone inscriptions of the Vijayanagar Empire show the common roots. Both scripts are based on the unique concept of an "*akshara*" found only in India.

Indo-Aryan Languages are closely related to languages found in Europe and the middle east. Since these are common in the northern part of the Indian sub-continent, there is reason to claim that those

speaking Dravidian languages were earlier inhabitants. This is generalized into an effort to trace a Dravidian origin of the various tribal languages in India and even the language on the seals of the Indus valley civilization. It is also common to treat the large corpus of the oral tradition, which is largely in another Indo-Aryan language, "Sanskrit" as the heritage of the "Aryan dominance".

Oral tradition and literature exist in Dravidian languages. Some of this is a translation of Sanskrit works. But there are independent works which like the "*nalayara divya prabandham*" (4000 divine songs) in Tamil are more than 1200 years old. But due to the similarities with the main Hindu tradition and being extensively patronized by brahmins, these are also seen as remnants of Aryan invasion and dominance. Unfortunately, just like Jantar Mantar, these concerns are not restricted to scholastic study. These weak arguments are employed to justify emotional acts in contemporary India, necessitating the current critical examination

Why do all the people in North speak Indo-Aryan languages? For that matter, how does a language become common over a large number of people? As Jared Diamond in his book, "Guns, Germs and Steel" discussed, there are two possible ways. The first and simplest possibility is that it is the language of the rulers. For example, all Egyptians speak Arabic today because the country came under the rule of people who speak that language. Eventually the population was converted to Islam and Arabic became the language of the rulers and the people. This is possible only after the formation of empires and the emergence of universal religions.

The second possibility by which people speak a common language emerged along with agriculture, in the earlier period of human history. A group of people may have developed new method of agriculture. They spread into new geographic areas where this agriculture was unknown taking their language along with them. The Chinese, for ex-

ample moved all over the far east, taking rice cultivation along with them. Thus the entire area of modern China, a huge area has a common language.

When neither of these possibilities exist, people do not have a common language. For example, the languages spoken by the various native Amerindian tribes belong to different families and have nothing in common even though the people themselves lived very close to one another. Similarly, tribes in the island of Papua New Guinea speak extremely diverse languages, though they all live in close neighborhood of one another and practice the same forms of agriculture and food gathering. The reason is obvious. Trade in these societies is purely by barter exchange of goods. There are no other religious or administrative interactions which make a common language necessary. Mere existence of common vocabulary is not sufficient to indicate common origin. These words may have been adopted due to contact rather than common origin. Certainly there are many unknowns in this line of argument, but the attempts to place our surviving tribal languages in either of the dominant language families of India is somewhat troubling particularly in view of the emotionally charged politics that follow.

Agriculturally India is extremely diverse. Till the recent development of large scale irrigation and trade, north-west India was largely a wheat cultivating and consuming society. It is very close to the world's oldest wheat cultivated area, the fertile crescent in modern day Iraq. The area along the eastern coast stretching from Tamil Nadu to Bengal and extending into the lower Gangetic plains of eastern Uttar Pradesh and the North Eastern states are rice cultivating areas. In much of the southern peninsula the climate does not even permit wheat cultivation. Most of the interior regions of peninsular India were traditionally accustomed to growth and consumption of coarse cereals, *jowar* and *bajra*. Clearly, it is difficult to believe that the emergence of people speaking a common tongue, for example prakrit in north India or a

Dravidian proto Tamil in the south is due to a common agricultural technology. Thus one falls back to the alternate hypothesis that the common language is a consequence of the rulers speaking it. Superficially this sounds a perfect justification for Aryan domination. They became the masters and forced their language on everyone. The devil they say is in the detail.

The Aryans who came to India arrived, and the language more or less proves that some people who speak these languages have arrived, at least a thousand years before the common era. There is very little knowledge regarding the political organization of the Indus valley civilization which predates this period. Whether the civilization was ended by Aryan invasion or as the more recent theory holds, declined due to environmental causes even before the entry of Aryans, all this took place well before 1000 BC. The Aryans meet neither of the two criteria mentioned above. In view of the three different agricultural regions, they could not use a unique agriculture for expansion. Since Vedic culture was pastoral they could not have established a centralized urban society.

Historical records of kings and empires in northern India date from approximately the fifth century BC, the time of Gautama Buddha and Mahavira the founders of the famous religions, Buddhism and Jainism. In southern parts of India kings known to historians emerged even later. Tribal societies may have hereditary chiefs that may be named as kings or emperors, but they do not have the complex social and economic interactions over a large area. However, this is required to encourage all the population to speak a common language.

So when and how did the Indo-Aryan and Indo-Dravidian languages hold sway in India? Most likely after the emergence of empires identified by historians. The history of Telugu literature offers a hint. This literature began to be composed after the eleventh century, when kings with family links to the southern Tamilian rulers gained ascen-

dancy. The kings ruling the present day Andhra Pradesh in the early centuries of the common era used prakrit as their inscriptions show.

The accepted academic position that dates *puranic* literature in Sanskrit, a language nobody actually spoke, but constituted an "official language of the elite" to the few centuries on either side of the common era then makes much sense. It does not require imagination to realize that people were continuously being co-opted along with the integration of various philosophical ideas. Just as the non-*khsatriyas* were co-opted and accepted as kings, people were most probably co-opted into all the castes including brahmins. The consolidated Indian philosophical heritage was initially composed in an Aryan tongue, but was not specifically or even dominantly Aryan. Buddhist and Jain philosophies were also not Vedic. They were vehemently anti-Vedic. The Hinduism they challenge is the ritualistic culture of the pastoral Aryans. They composed their writings largely in prakrit. While it serves emotionally to label this a language of the people as opposed to Sanskrit, the language of the elite brahmins, the question is how prakrit an Indo-Aryan language became a language of the people in the first place and when?

The effort to see the Indian society through the tinted glasses of Aryan and Dravidian is very troublesome. A cursory look at the actual content of the oral tradition without preconceived ideas is necessary. In as much as most of this vast literature is related to philosophy, religion and ritual, it is necessary to look at these aspects. Let us consider as a working hypothesis that people speaking the original Indo-Aryan language have dominated the country to the extent that at least by the fifth century BC, dominant languages of the entire north India were Indo-Aryan. But the spiritual and philosophical views expressed in the texts at the beginning of the Christian era closely correspond to what an average Indian believes and practices today and this is a complete anti-thesis of the Vedic literature. So we at once identify a great discrepancy. People who dominated the society, completely

disowned their own heritage. In simple words, the mighty Aryan gods, *Indra* and *Varuna* became servants and supplicants to the to the current supreme gods, *Shiva*, *Vishnu* and in some quarters the mother goddess *Kali*. Why and how? An imaginary equivalent would be for contemporary religion of the Americas to be Amerindian despite the European political dominance.

It does not require much to be convinced that Indian history is more complex than is admitted. Here as elsewhere being a scholar or an expert is more a hindrance than a help. There is so much similarity between the gods of the pagan Greeks and the pantheon described in the Vedas. The same tendency to associate gods with various natural forces and phenomena are observed. Even the behaviors appear to match. Jealousy, drunkenness and debauchery are copiously described. The Aryans had their unique language and rituals not found outside the Indian subcontinent, but in imagining their gods they were scarcely original.

Consider in contrast the beliefs that have emerged as a confluence of the Buddhist, Jain and Hindu thought processes that emerged about two thousand years ago. Philosophical enquiry lead to a *karma* theory that envisaged a continuous cycle of birth and death and definition of practices that would lead to a liberation from this cycle. The distinction between the Hindu concept on the one hand and the Jain or Buddhist doctrines on the other is not simply between polytheistic Hinduism and godless Buddhism. The difference is between the belief of the Hindus that "GOD" can "help" in the liberation (and in other matters too, since he is so capable) and the Buddhists and Jains who held that "the incarnation of divinity" in the form of a Mahavira or Gautama Buddha is "a philosopher and guide" but will not directly "grant liberation". Obviously he would not interfere in other matters. So there is no "GOD" and you will have to experience the fruits of your *karma* till you achieve liberation.

The conflict between the “*suras*” and the “*asuras*” as depicted in the Hindu literature, composed after this clarification of the philosophical positions supports this distinction. “*Asuras*” represented those who believed in the efficacy of the rituals, but did not see any discretionary or overriding role for God. They believed only in their own ability and effort to perform the necessary austerities and attain the goals, leaving the “Gods” with no choice in the matter. The *puranas* were essentially written to assure the general population that this “*asura*” approach of self dependence would always fail.

The *Bhagavat Gita* represents the final definition of this philosophy. This integration, by any means more than two thousand years old mentions all four methods practiced by Indians till recently. These four are the path of desireless action, (ignored for the most of the historical period!), the path of renouncing the world and contemplation and intellectual enquiry, the path of devotion to the god and finally the path of meditation, breath control and *yoga* exercises that has become a major export to western audiences. These are traditionally named *karma*, *gnana*, *bhakti* and *raja yogas*. Clearly all these, including the philosophical analyses that form the “*Upanishads*” are non-Vedic. The *upansihads* are traditionally called *Vedanta* or the end portion of the Vedas, but they really represent the “end” of the dominance of Vedic thought. The most likely source for all these ideas and approaches to life are non-Aryan people. This claim is not as silly as it may appear at first. The *Shiva* bhakti literature in Tamil is at least as old as the Sanskrit bhakti literature though it may not be as old as the Vedas.

It beggars belief that the dominant segment of the society would permit their own all powerful gods to become menial servants of the holy trinity of *Vishnu*, *Shiva* and *Kali* or permit their heaven to become merely a temporary guest house of no importance and permit writings that spoke literally of Vedic rituals being a waste of time and effort. How was the concept of *Agni* or fire as conveyer of offerings to gods converted into the currently accepted and prescribed mode for

the worship of various gods? Word for word, step for step what is offered to a God when he is invited to our presence is what a good host is expected to offer to any honored human guest. You offer some cool water to wash hands and legs in this dusty tropical environment, some cool liquid to drink, a bath, food and words of praise. It is difficult to even imagine a more non-Vedic ritual!

The most important issue for the present is the startling difference between these views and those expressed in the Vedic literature. It is very easy to record this change without wondering why? To be sure often nominal obeisance is paid in Hindu religion to the Vedas as the source of all knowledge. But the Jains and Buddhists were not the only ones to refuse to do this. The *lingayats* or *veerashaivas* of Karnataka did it explicitly and the followers of Ramanuja in Tamil Nadu simply concentrated on their Tamil store house of devotion dismissing the importance of Vedic rituals and studies.

Obviously the important concepts such as the cyclic nature of human life and creation are external to the Vedic thought. Only when we accept that equations between the different groups in ancient India were more democratic than the protagonists of dominance would allow can the totality of the Indian culture begin to make any sense. It is not that merely brahmin dominance that lead to the acceptance of the mainstream Hinduism by the "Dravidian people". The ideas and concepts that emerged at the start of the common era came from widely different origins some of them perhaps Dravidian. The ideas and philosophies could be interpreted reconfigured to ones own needs.

Nothing illustrates this as the differing images of *Shiva*. At one end he is only one among the eight guardians of the cardinal directions. At the other end he is the creator and destroyer. The two views from two different sources got merged. The commonly expressed view is of *Brahma* as the creator, *Vishnu* as the protector and *Shiva* as the destroyer. Despite its elegance and its popularity in modern writings,

it is incommensurate with the *Vaishnavite*, *Shavite* or the *Shakteya* traditions. Once we ignore the tradition of seeing everything as domination and exploitation one sees another reason why Kapila, Gautama Buddha and Rishabha the Jain *theerthankara* became incarnations of Vishnu in the puranans. Their philosophical ideas have already been absorbed.

One related question is rather intriguing. Is there any historical basis for all the stories that comprise the puranic literature. For example, is the Ramayana a real story or merely fictional. In analogy with Homer's Iliad or the Old Testament most scholars seem to feel that there is at least some core historical authenticity about these stories. The general attitude is to treat anything that is impossible, a story of a monkey talking or flying across the ocean as fiction or exaggeration while accepting anything that seems possible, particularly anything negative or contrary to current humanistic ideas, rape, murder and debauchery by the dominant group for example as true. The dominance ideas are often fleshed out by such efforts. Thus one tends to hear of the "*raskshasas*" and "*asuras*" mentioned in these works being termed as Dravidians, or to extrapolate the origin of the name of the heroine of Ramayana, "*Sita*" (the end of a plough) as the domination of the forest dwellers by the agriculturalists. These form a counterpart to the extreme traditionalists who make every effort to deify each and every part of this vast literature and project it as a golden standard for human behavior.

There are a few personal worries about these enterprises. If the *puranas* are to be considered as historical why not the *jataka* tales? These Buddhist tales also refer to the gods and *yakshas* and so on. True, they are much more sensible and closer to the modern humanistic morals. But if writing this sort of fiction was a part of the Indian heritage may not the *puranas* also reflect a similar effort to use story telling as a means of conveying the essence of the religion? In view of the more complex and *ad hoc* stitching together of diverse concepts

that resulted in the Hinduism formulated around two thousand years ago, the stories would also be a hotch-potch. It is to be noted that the earliest dates ascribed to the puranas by the linguists are not far from the dates of compilation of the *jataka* tales. Once again some of the *puranas* according to these scholars are as recent as the tenth century. These were apparently rewritten to incorporate local stories of various regions or new divinities, *Radha* for example. So why should one give any credence to the earlier versions of the puranas either. One issue that is not given much weight is the diversity of the stories. Just as an example, one literary work of the first century simply rewrote the Mahabharata eliminating the war itself, while another depicts a fight between the eternal friends Krishna and Arjuna. One sees the same uninhibited tendency to create new stories, even in modern India. The best examples are new myths popularized by the TV serials, the Ramayan and the Mahabharat.

It is reasonable to accept that descriptions of social practices or geographical features reflect some historical facts. Just as any fiction set in India would describe contemporary cities and rivers, the Ramayana describes actual places in India. The habits and norms would reflect actual societal values to some extent. But here again the restrictive iconography that was employed in this literature has to be considered. Some of the *kavi samayas* or descriptions approved for use by the poet have been mentioned while describing the oral tradition. According to such constraints on writing, the heroine is always elaborately described as having fallen in love with the hero and suffering the pangs of separation. This is elaborately described, possibly for the pleasure of the male readers than a true description of the status of women.

There are some changes in the writing of the Ramayana with time. Saint composer *Tulasi Das* for example, described only Sita's feet or the face in his Hindi version of Ramayana, the *Ramacharitamanas*. In so doing, he was diverging from the classical

tradition where describing the beauty of every part of the female was accepted and even demanded. It does look probable that he was influenced by the Islamic norms regarding the nonsuitability of expressions of beauty and sexuality in the religious context. Modern scholars elaborately describe the differences in the story as narrated in different traditions. Reportedly a Tibetan version makes *Rama* and *Sita* siblings. Possibly marriage of siblings, was known among the tribes in that region just like Egyptian royalty and some Polynesian tribes. Thus in telling the story the local customs were incorporated into the story.

What scholarly analyses fail to consider is the key motive for writing the story. Was it to justify the belief in *Rama* as a divinity that grants your salvation or was it otherwise? There are not three hundred Ramayanas but only two. In the first case, the devotee does not care to evaluate the story in terms of social norms and practices. Human language is flexible enough for him to explain away the descriptions that are emotionally upsetting at first glance. Thanks to the antagonistic Buddhist and Jain interpretations, versions that did not treat *Rama* as divine have existed in India for a long time. Many of the drastic variations much prized by the secular oriented scholar belong to the second category.

But the elaborate scholasticism that seeks to identify the locale of these stories outside India or interpret these stories as a history of real conflicts between the ancestors of present Indian castes or communities is quite baseless. Like the comment about *sutras* of Vedic mathematics being a case of first doing the mathematics and then associating it with *mantras*, people first form an ideological position from personal emotions or modern studies and then ascribe great values to the small bits and pieces that can be made to fit this ideology. The source material being in Sanskrit and in the case of the Vedic literature in an archaic form of Sanskrit helps a lot with this since most claims cannot be verified by a common man . One can simply realize

the truth by a cursory look at the bizarre complexity of these stories which cannot be molded into a coherent narrative.

The stories collected in the corpus of the oral tradition have only religious relevance. Trying to estimate their truth value in the modern historical context of objectivity is a futile exercise. The myths that surround individuals who lived in recent memory for example saint *Tyagaraja* in the nineteenth century Tamil Nadu or *Shiridi Sai Baba*, who lived a few decades ago are a clear indication that disregarding objectivity and creating stories to emphasize the essential religious message is a continuing tradition. Perhaps myth making is a part of all societies and in all contexts. However the Hindus seem to be more susceptible than most and once again I attribute this to our ingrained oral tradition.

I view the attempts at dividing India into Aryans or Dravidians, or forward and backward castes, modern urbanites and *adivasis* or other such schisms as sometimes well meaning but mostly misguided. Some of these schisms are accentuated to create a polarization that could support affirmative action to correct current disadvantages faced by some groups. Sometimes these are attempts at preventing the dangers of a monolithic ultra nationalistic or even a fascist majority. Another strand of this misguided distortion of the Indian history is to ascribe much more symbiosis between Islam and modern Hinduism. These approaches are not merely misguided because there is little justification. They are misguided because their failure in contemporary India is visible. Some of the issues relevant to Hindu society have been discussed. The true state of the Muslim-Hindu interactions in medieval India has also to be examined to complete our study of the past of "MY India". The above description ignores the utility and role of religion in personal life. This is outside the scope of our present discussion and my own views were expressed in the earlier book*.

* On Walking The Knife Edge (Chapters 4 and 5)

Hindu Temples In Muslim India

To ignore the issue of Hindu temples in Muslim India in the interests of political correctness is counter productive. The issue is relevant to "MY India" which inherits divisive issues most prominently the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid imbroglio. To dismiss this as merely divisive politics created by the neo-fascists of the majority religion ignores the true reason for the Muslim attacks on Hindu temples. The world was aghast at the Taliban for recently destroying the Bamiyan statues of Buddha in Afghanistan. But how many are willing to mention that the statues did not have faces when they were razed down recently? Strong disapproval of idolatry was an integral part of all three monotheistic religions and even Christians did not use any icons or idols in churches till about the eighth century. Muslims and Jews do not approve of them to the present date. So it would have been a miracle if the medieval Muslim rulers had not been against Hindu temples. Contrary to the convenient wisdom that temples were attacked because of the wealth hoarded therein, they were attacked just as the Bamiyan Buddhas were defaced even before they were destroyed, for purely religious reasons. That is the reason granite figures thirty feet

in size were broken with great effort. Not because there was some foolish belief that the stone contained gold.

The truth about the status of temples in Muslim India is sobering. Even after power has been lost, Muslim rulers rarely permitted construction of temples. It is a popular mythology to throw all the blame on Aurnagazeb, the last powerful Moghul emperor. But consider the fact that there are no architecturally significant temples in Delhi even one hundred years old despite the Moghuls loosing all power from the start of the nineteenth century. If one travels from Amritsar to Calcutta, a distance of nearly 2000 km, there is not one architecturally significant temple even dating to the time of emperor Akbar. It would be difficult to count the number of temples if a similar trip was undertaken from Chennai to Kannyakumari in Tamil Nadu.

Akbar was undoubtedly great. He did permit the construction of a few temples, but even here there was no spirit of equality. Even Akbar the Great, for all his generous treatment of Hindus did not construct a small temple in the great complex of Fatehpur Sikri. Of course it is simply unrealistic to expect Akbar to displease all his Muslim subjects to that extent. The Hindus were permitted to live as “*dhimmis*” under later Muslim rule by paying *zizyah* tax, but they had no right to build temples or even pray if a Muslim could hear. Incidentally, Buddhism was not eliminated in India by brahmins and their philosophy. Nalanda was flourishing Buddhist university till it was razed by Alauddin Khilji. The Muslims did not recognize “godless” Buddhists even as “*dhimmis*”. This was the price they paid for their more humane mythology in *jataka* tales mentioned earlier.

But what to make of the stories unearthed by the expert. Examples are cited about Muslim rulers who rewarded Hindu writers or artists or even provided support to some temple? What about the presence of Hindu commanders in the Mughal army and of Muslim fighters in the Hindu armies? These stories are mostly true. There are equiva-

lent stories of the respect shown to the saints, fighters or scholars from the lower castes and even the dalits. One can even look at the segment of humanity uniformly suppressed by all religions, the women. Razia sultana (1236-1240) of Delhi and Rani Rudrama (1259-1289) of Warangal, Andhra Pradesh were almost contemporary rulers who inherited empires from their fathers and ruled them. But they are not relevant examples to decide if there was gender equality in medieval India.

The medieval societies were ruled by absolute monarchs. While they would not want to antagonize entire groups and invite coups, they were free to bestow largess on select individuals at their absolute discretion. This explains the limited flexibility a ruler like Akbar had. There cannot be universal rules of equality. Often, absolute rulers bestowed such benefits on absurd grounds. This was not even limited to weak and failed leaders. Mohammad Shah Rangila, a late Mughal emperor is castigated for appointing a fruit seller as the governor of Multan. But the great Krishnadeva Raya, the greatest ruler of Vijayanagar established his barber as a subordinate ruler just because he shaved him well one day! It is important to realize that the people spread these stories for praise or condemnation, but did not think that the rulers should not have such powers. That is the true evidence for the lack of modern thinking!

The important issue is the small number of such recipients of any caste or of any community. As was said earlier, the society was technologically poor and the small surplus available was cornered by the ruler and his coterie for their opulence and display. But why is all this relevant? Hysteria is not a justified response to history. But the story of the Hindu temples in Muslim India or more properly the absence of Hindu temples in Muslim India is relevant to understand the strength of the so called syncretic Hindu-Muslim culture involving the *Sufi* saints and the Bhakti cults of medieval India.

It is possible to identify some examples of cross cultural influences. The rising popularity of the worship of a god without form culminating in the Sikh tradition is certainly an example. There are differences in dress codes and habits between the Hindus of the south and north India with those from the north displaying significantly more commonality with Muslims. But was this a diffusion because of proximity or an expression of growing commonality? In so doing did the Hindus ignore the true status of temples in Muslim India? Was the situation "tolerable"?

An interesting architectural example would highlight the issue. Both the palaces in Amer Fort near Jaipur and the Mehrangarh Fort in Jodhpur have *sheesh mahals* (palace of mirrors) a typical Islamic concept. The one in Amer has very few Hindu icons or portraits of Gods. The one in Mehrangarh is full of pictures of Gods. It could be a case of Hindu artisans developing the expertise with the initially alien art form. It could also be related to the Amer fort being built in the heyday of Mughal power and the Mehrangarh palace after its decline. The portrait galleries of Rajasthan princes show that just as the elite Hindu princes employed Muslim dress codes and patronized Muslim art in the earlier era, they patronized western art and dress with the advent of the British.

Similarly, the violin, a modern import from the west is now the most common accompaniment to classical Karnatic music, but that has not changed the basic idiom or ethos the music. Ghazals and qawwalies are examples of nonclassical music in India that have Islamic roots. There may have been a minor influence of classical Indian music on the romantic poetry that preceded the golden age of Urdu. But the difference between minor influence due to proximity and basic nature of the art has to be recognized.

As with all pre-industrial societies, medieval India needed empathy and solace since there was not much practical capability for

countering human misery. There was little capability for communicating a local calamity like a storm or flood and no facility for rapidly providing humanitarian aid. The people needed psychological help to reconcile themselves to fate and that could be provided by pious souls. However, the philosophical systems of the Islam and Hinduism are quite antagonistic. The ancient societies were very religious and orthodox. The ideas, practices and philosophies of the *Sufi* saints and Hindu godmen were different, notwithstanding external similarities of piety and love. The philosophical expositions of Sankara or Ramanuja and the Bhakti tradition of medieval India are squarely based on the traditions of the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Bhagavata Purana*. Both of these according the accepted scholarship have been fixed in the current form at least by the first century. The influence of the *Sufi*'s is quite superficial.

Due to the amorphous nature, Hindu acceptance of the *Sufis* was quite open. But quite a lot of the examples of shared living are of more recent colonial period when the power imbalance between the Hindus and the Muslims was absent. Some of the more popular claims are outright myths. For example, the "*phool walon ki sair*", in Delhi, sending of flowers to the Hindu temple and the Muslim *Durgah* is a popular example of the secularists. However, this is a post independence modification. The original practice, incidentally of the early nineteenth century involved only the *Durgah*. Bhadrachalam in Andhra Pradesh is cited as an example of a Hindu temple supported by a Muslim ruler. But the mythology of the temple is associated with the last Bahmani ruler, Tani Shah, who was captured and imprisoned by Aurangzeb. It is silly to imagine that the victorious Sunni successor regime had magnanimously decided to support a *kafir*! The present practices are a consequence of the Nizam Government taking over the activities of a local Hindu zamindar late in the colonial period.

Hindus do visit various *durgahs* and venerate *Sufis*. It has to be admitted however that examples of Muslim devotion towards Hindu

temples or activities are much fewer and of a lower key. Muslim resistance to change from orthodoxy has been discussed earlier from many angles. The traditional calendars used by the two groups are a good example of this imbalance. The Muslims continue to use their pure lunar calendar despite the large discrepancy with true movement of the seasons. The Hindu calendar incorporated both the days of the week and the twelve signs of the zodiac from external sources. The days of the week originated in Babylonia many millennia ago and have become universal. The ancient Indian calendar did not have any concept of a week, only of the "*paksha*" or the lunar half month of waxing and waning moon. The "*vara*" or the day was appended subsequently. The Hindu calendar did not have the twelve signs of the zodiac, but used twenty seven "*nakshatras*" or stars closely associated with the moon. These had to be subsequently subdivided into four "*padas*" or parts so that each house of the zodiac could be equated with nine padas. A small but indicative example of flexibility and change.

The enormous difference between the ideas in the Vedas and the concretized Hindu culture developed by around the first century has already been highlighted. To understand the very superficial contribution of the Muslim-Hindu interactions, one has merely to contrast it with the impact of a modern giant like Vivekananda. While the *Sufis* may have contributed to local empathy and peace, Vivekananda has transformed Hinduism to the point that what many a modern Hindu believes and practices is often far different from what his forefathers had done. The most important issue here once again is the modernity of Vivekananda. He was open to ideas from other religions, from modern science and so on and was not the least committed to a stupid reiteration of the greatness of India. Just like Gandhi who followed him, he recognized that while there are diamonds in Hindu culture there were dung heaps too.

To shoehorn this complexity into a so called syncretic culture, ignoring the bitterness caused the to the Hindus by the reality of Hindu

temples in Muslim India, even with the best of intentions from scattered observations is foolhardy. It is counter productive since the sermons are resented for their inaccuracy and makes the people receptive to other outlandish claims which are not so benign. The advance of malignant ideologies in contemporary India has to be squarely attributed to these foolish attempts. The psychologist's advice not to suppress bad experiences is quite relevant.

Leave The Past Well Alone!

History is most often used as a justification for various ideologies. Since modern historical scholarship is supposed to be objective and scientific, it is often invoked in support of ideologies. Many of these ideologies encourage group identities to either correct historical injustices of disadvantaged groups or as a necessity for true and universal progress. While a Marxist invokes class consciousness, multiculturalism, which respects divisions based on race, ethnicity, language or religion is the more recent preference of the modern intelligentsia.

The present discussion moves away from such respectful treatment of groups. A discussion of the limitations the science of any sociological study of humans takes one too far from the present discussion and is part of an earlier book*. "My India" depends only on the the core message of modern scientific spirit, to examine every issue critically, verify every piece of received wisdom and above all

*How Well Do We Know it (Chapter 14)

evaluate the strength of the knowledge offered by putative experts. As discussed earlier, the advice that emerges for human action deserves only provisional acceptance through a peaceful democratic decision making.

Thus, the desire to simply ignore history as a guide to human action in the Indian context. This is amply justified by the critical examination of many of the well entrenched scholastic views of India's past in the previous vignettes. Ignoring history does not mean turning a blind eye to the reality of the present situation in India. Merely a rejection of advice based on historical study. Thus a summary rejection of the view that in the Indian context caste is class.

The support to core ideas of human progress which emerged in the European context, does not constitute an approval of all that was done by the colonial masters. There have been many drawbacks in the European implementation of policies. Eugenics and slavery are one facet of their not being able to recognize the weakness of the Darwinian science in that context. The French revolution included fraternity (the basic problem of groups) along with equality and liberty as a goal. The result was installation of Napoleon as an emperor. The multiculturalism of modern Europe shows a modern example of undue weight being given to weak knowledge. Economics has not been considered so far. In the discussion of the present and the future of "MY India" there is no respect to economic theory and in particular markets as a sole or most important tool for societal action. The social catastrophes created by the Irish famine and the Bengal famine point to the failure to recognize the limitations of market mechanisms.

In the Indian context, in addition to the misery of unhindered free markets, the nondemocratic colonial administration exacerbated the essential inequality of the caste system. For example, the resentment of the brahmins has naturally become very severe when large fractions of them started to find a stable and secure source of liveli-

hood (and assured pensions!) in the employment of the colonial government. True, the "gods on earth" arrogance, cornering the gifts from the kings and lording over "*agraharams*" (brahmin owned villages not taxed by the kings) was bad. But this was confined to a small segment of brahmins. All the recipients were brahmins but not all brahmins were recipients, in fact very few were.

The inferiority complex of being colonial subjects ignores the harsh reality of medieval life and creates an illusory world of prosperity despoiled by the colonial masters. Similarly, in the interests of creating a sense of commanderie among the dalits, while rightly emphasizing the inhuman reality of manual scavenging, it is never admitted that this was a practice contemporary to the British era. The traditional practice was for everyone to go out of the village limits. There was neither a concept of a bathroom or a toilet in a traditional Hindu village house.

The sad reality of contemporary India is that a person who jokes that "when you see a brahmin and a snake kill the brahmin first" is still a "social reformer" but a person who makes the same joke replacing the brahmin with a Muslim is automatically a bigot and a fascist. Merely sermonizing on the bigots who challenge the scholastic accomplishment of a secular study of 300 Ramayanas fails to convince. The tensions in the current society are the result of the post independence hypocrisy of selectively respecting religious emotions of minority religions. The consequence is the current necessity to accommodate the most communal demands of the majority religion, while screaming about their fascist tendencies. Today most political parties bend over backwards to accommodate the Khap Panchayats and their medieval world views. This is a classic case of "for you have sown the wind you shall reap the whirlwind".

Challenging this hypocrisy and political correctness is necessary to eliminate the hurdles facing "My India" and for this, I empha-

size, history is irrelevant. In some sense the traditional literary sources of the oral tradition are also history. They have at least the advantage of being composed without an active desire to be objective and factually correct. What has been said has an aesthetic appeal. The modern historian on the contrary uses conveniently chosen isolated facts to build grand edifices that despite the scholarship do not even appeal aesthetically. It is best we choose the refrain.

"Leave the past well alone, analyze today's status
and build a new tomorrow"

MY INDIA : THE PRESENT

The Gun, The Bandh And The Fast

Contemporary Indians are best divided into three groups. One relatively small group chooses the gun as a tool of acquiring power and completely change the current democratic society. Though these active participants form a small group, there is a small but significant section of the population who "sympathize" with this world view and do not grant any legitimacy to the current system. Another small group believes in the "fast" as a necessarily correct methodology for coercing the democratically elected government to the moral high ground. Once again a large segment of Indians support the "right" of these morally superior individuals to guide the society through such acts. Finally there is a large group, which uses a bandh to force the government to concede their demands. Most Indians belong to more than one of these groups.

The intellectual analyses of Marx are the guide for those favoring the gun and those sympathizing with their cause if not their methods. For them, successive governments since independence have

no legitimacy since they failed to eliminate or even reduce inequalities in the society. Gandhi is the patron saint of those employing the bandh and the fast as morally justified means of coercing the government into the "right direction". Very few are willing to challenge the justification of these approaches which I see as completely contrary to "MY India". Thus my rhetorical comment at the start of the book wondering if there is anyone in "MY India" but me.

Those trying to achieve a revolution through the barrel of a gun justify their violence with their ideology. The rest are influenced by a sense of universal brotherhood and empathy. Why not "To each according to his need and by each according to his ability"? "How can one reconcile luxuries to some and malnutrition to others?" Such questions have an instinctive appeal for humans. Only those with a firm intellectual commitment to the "laissez fair" economic policies counter these questions with passionate arguments of freedom and responsibility. Support for this philosophy which essentially demands separation of the government and economics is rare among Indians; though many a forward caste intellectual tries to invoke these principles in arguments against the reservation policies. Except for the rare committed Marxist intellectual sympathetic to the cause of the Maoist guerillas, most Indians who question the very basis of the present system are influenced by empathy.

However, one should not lose sight of the true reason for the emergence of Marx and Proudhon in the nineteenth century Europe. Prior to the Industrial revolution, inequality was not a moral issue. Life styles of a significant fraction of even the underdeveloped societies of today would have been the envy of medieval kings. So inequality is more of a modern concern. Even under the worst capitalist exploitation, the segment of society enjoying the benefits of technology is larger than medieval aristocracy. So the questions arise. If we could put a man on the moon, why can we not abolish hunger and misery? After all, how long should one wait for the society to deliver? It requires a

lot of self control or selfishness to reconcile to this reality. Thus the sympathy for the "misguided" youth who have taken to arms.

In reality, the youth are not misguided. They are only convinced of Marxism as a science. I have discussed earlier* the limitation of economic science and the problems of scale, extrapolation and time, which plague both Marxism and Market Economics as a guide to human and societal action. While it is futile to address the armed revolutionaries with such arguments, I am more sanguine regarding the sympathizers of revolution being convinced by the approaches I outline for addressing the real problems when I discuss the future of "MY India" later, but problems with the advocates of the bandh and the fast are more important in the Indian context.

The bandh and the fast are considered intrinsically justified by a vast majority of Indians. Gandhi, the man who placed these instruments in their hands is a mahatma or a holy person. It may even sound ridiculous to question the morality of his actions. So even when some of us are aghast at some of the demands for government action we rarely question the instruments themselves. But there is an apocryphal story of the advice given by Gopalakrishna Gokhale to the mahatma where he essentially said, "It is easy enough to encourage people to break the rules. But it will be a problem to get them to obey the rules after independence". The current use of the Gandhian instrument for many a questionable goal makes this advice prophetic. In the pre-independence era, those wielding the power were not answerable to the people. The people had no mechanisms for altering the system. Thus Gandhi's espousal of the bandh and the fast was justified. But post independence, accepting these not only de-legitimizes the rule of law. When government concedes to emotional blackmail, through these tools by one group, those opposed to the action take recourse to other illegal actions to negate these concessions.

*How Well Do We Know it (Chapter 12)

Gandhi is definitely relevant. But as a guide to the individual not as a guide to the society. Gandhi was not a politician, he was a saint. For me the saintliness of the man is exemplified the response of the society to his assassination. There was pathos and sadness, not a spirit of revenge. There was no spontaneous violence against the RSS or the Hindu Mahasabha though the government of the day eventually banned these organizations, a futile symbolic action. The contrast with the consequences of the assassination of Indira Gandhi when large scale rioting erupted is obvious. The surprising thing about people claiming the halo of Gandhi and going on fast with various demands on the government is that none of them had the faith to do so during the 2002 riots. I surely expect a person truly influenced by Gandhi to have tried that. After all, that is what Gandhi successfully did in 1947 to cool tempers in Bengal.

Morality and religion as Gandhi taught us are relevant. Consider the tragic events of 1984. For the wounds of 1984 to heal, it is necessary for the majority to stop blaming the "politicians" for the events and be shameful of their gloating at the suffering of the Sikhs. This gloating was quite common, though no one would admit it today. Just as importantly, before "honoring" the assassins of Indira Gandhi, the Akalis would do well to be ashamed of the murders committed in the years leading to 1984. These murders and lawlessness directed from the Golden Temple were the cause of the anger in the majority community and the resultant gloating referred to earlier. But individuals can feel a sense of shame, not a community! It has to be an individual subjective religious experience, not a meaningless public posturing in the interests of political correctness. Gandhi is a relevant source of strength for such morality.

Unfortunately, while methods advocated by him are praised and employed, acceptance of his advice is partial. Gandhi called for bandhs and encouraged people to break unjust laws. But he also insisted that suffering the punishment prescribed for breaking a "wrong" law

was absolutely necessary. The noble suffering he "religiously" insisted was needed to genuinely change the hearts of those in power. He pointed to the American philosopher Henry David Thoreau as the source of this idea of civil disobedience. In any democratic society, civil disobedience is a key part of the evolution of the society. But extrapolating this to a blackmail by one group or the other, in the absence of genuine conversion as expected by Gandhi, is not a wise approach. A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still! Is it a wonder that as the pressure recedes, there will be an attempt to wiggle out of commitments made without democratic sanction?

The problem with the concept of a bandh in India is even more of an anachronism in a democratic society than the misuse of civil disobedience. Organizing and preventing bandhs have become media circuses by political parties. During the years of the CPM rule in Bengal, state sponsored bandhs had become a source of open ridicule as excuses to be lazy in all but the leftist circles. When Rajiv Gandhi was the prime minister, the Government of the day issued an order that employees in Delhi must attend office, even if public transport is not available on the next day due to the bandh called by the opposition parties. The government officers ordered dinners from caterers and rented mattresses for sleeping so that the government staff were available the next day and the Government of the day could claim that the bandh was a failure.

The problem with these general strikes is that they are totally symbolic. Consider a strike by a trade union. The loss in production is a pressure on the management of the company and the loss of wages a pressure on the union, ensuring that there is a desire for rapid resolution of the issue. There can still be cheating as well as unrealistic and emotional demands on both sides. The strike is a necessary tool for a trade union. But in a general strike, the losses are spread on the society. Then it is the weakest that suffer the most. Honestly, there is no loss for the political parties that call for the bandh and no benefit to the

Government in conceding the demands. But a realization of the these limitations of the fast and the bandh is totally missing in the Indian context. These three activities of collective action are complemented by similarly fruitless approaches at the individual level to be considered in the next piece that are emotionally supported in India.

The Angry Young Man, Personal Revenge And Law

The angry young man is the description that has come into vogue following the success of the Hindi cinema icon Amitabh Bachchan in the early seventies. The extraordinary success of this image, depicting a young man single handedly challenging injustice in the society and succeeding is unique. This narrative differs from the American "wild west stories" though many parts have been borrowed from them. The earlier image of the hero in movies transforming the society by personality, idealism and capability with physical fighting being restricted to self defense changed. The emotional response to the angry young man reveals the frustration of the society which was sore that the benefits expected from independence failed to emerge. In the twenty first century Indian society however, this uniquely Indian attraction of an angry young man has been replaced either by a copy of the contemporary western depiction of "violence without idealism" or of pessimism and defeat of idealism.

The idea of an angry young man who like Robin Hood breaks the law to help the weak and the defenseless resonates in all ancient

cultures. But the strong resonance of such a myth in a contemporary modern democratic society is very troubling. The respect and appreciation of this type of a hero in mainstream commercial Indian cinema is actually a true reflection of the defeatism and pessimism of vast segments of the Indian population. On one hand, there is utter despair and dissatisfaction with the progress achieved since independence. Thus, one believes that only a "super hero" in the secularized version of an incarnation of God can solve problems. Then again, there is an unwillingness to give respect to anything but a perfect society. Thus, every example of a crime or depraved behavior is not merely the crime of an individual, but the moral crime for which a section (caste, community, class) is morally culpable.

Again, just like violence during a bandh, a collective action of the society, violent personal revenge is felt to be justifiable and deserving sympathy. After all the much appreciated acts of the angry young man are acts of individual violence. An ineffective law deserves to be ignored or bypassed. What is being ignored is the consequent belittling of the fundamental civic covenant of the modern society. A modern society has no place for revenge and personal vendetta. The power of punishment for transgression of the norms of the society is reserved for the police and the judiciary. When bitterness and anguish over the perceived incompetence of the society to deliver justice spills over into personal implementation of punishment to the accused it exacerbates the very limitations of the society.

We discussed earlier the similar problem with demonstrations, bandhs, or other "societal actions" which create problems for the rest of the society. It is important once again to recapitulate Gandhi's response to Chauri Chaura during the early part of the freedom struggle. When the demonstrators went out of control and set fire to a police station, killing several policemen, Gandhi stopped the movement. His action was not merely "moral"; it is also "practical". These acts which are essentially lawless, whatever be their emotional resonance will

create feedback loops that reinforce lawlessness. Thus the attack by the relatives of a dead patient on doctors, protesting their incompetence or negligence, leads to strikes by the fraternity of doctors and demands for protection by the police, further reducing the already low efficiency of service. The innate sympathy for the angry young man and personal revenge is thus a contributory factor for the low efficiency, which is at least one of the causes of the malaise. Thus one has a classic chicken and egg conundrum.

It is not anyone's case that a human being can dissociate himself from all bonds. As the bonds of family, caste and community become weaker in a modern western democratic society, new identities and bonds are formed. Thus one ends with professional associations, regional affiliations and ultimately national identities. The scandals of various religious organizations extensively reported in the media are very instructive. Even those confined to the cloisters, monasteries or priesthoods, committed to a life of strict religious morality, find it difficult to be objective when members of their own fraternity are accused of wrongdoing.

The key factor is the limits that a democratic modern society places on the sympathetic acts. The only avenues open for supporting individuals in such a society takes the form of providing legal assistance to the accused or emotional and financial support to both the accused and the victim. The avenues for prosecuting the accused are limited to acting as the friends of the court (*amici curiae*). This is not only a resigned acceptance of the necessity of a system and the reality that any human construction will necessarily be imperfect. It is also a recognition that this the best that is humanly possible.

Before the advent of the modern democratic societies, both the religious aristocracy and the ruling caste or family, acted as the judges and arbitrators for the rest of the society. They were convinced of the necessity for retaining their own right of individual revenge. In con-

temporary India, there is an active tendency to imitate the medieval aristocracy and take the law into ones own hands. The Khap Panchayats in rural north India are merely the mirror images of the "courts" of the Maoist guerrillas. The extremely large delay in legal resolution of issues is often cited as a cause. But the primary problem I believe is the mind set. Most Indians do not recognize legal resolution as the only option. It is impossible for a legal resolution to be emotionally satisfying to all parties. The contemporary Indian sadly does not reconcile to this reality nor to the dangers of taking the law into their own hands.

As we shall see in a future essay, the overactive judiciary, in "public interest" gives extraordinary latitude to the legal definition of "fundamental rights" that cannot be violated. This is a major cause of the legal delays. However, these are other self imposed liabilities of the legal system in India. Many of these have emerged due to the unique path along which the Indian nation has charted its course since independence. These limitations are a very important part of "My India" at present and need to be understood and corrected for its glorious future.

What Rights Are Fundamental?

The motivation for employing the gun, the bandh, the fast or personal vengeance is frustration. Many feel that the law of the land does not reflect what they perceive as a “fundamental right” individually or as a group. Others follow this path because the laws are not being implemented to their satisfaction and in a timely fashion by the government or the judiciary. This frustration is exacerbated by the suspicion of a criminal conspiracy between the representatives of the people and the officials to continue the current state of exploitation. Even individual corruption is often attributed to the influence of the "exploitative system". Never does one question if fundamental rights being demanded are practically possible.

Industrial revolution rapidly enhanced human technological capabilities and enabled humans to have a better lifestyle. There have been efforts to ensure that these are equitably shared. There are two streams of this effort. One emerging from the British experience and the American revolution and has been a slow and painful effort to confer universal equality of opportunity. The second, respecting the

French Revolution and the legacy of Karl Marx demands equality of outcomes. Post independent India, has been extremely sympathetic to equality of outcomes. Unfortunately, success in extending even equal opportunities not to speak of equal outcomes has been pathetic. But, efforts in this direction will not be summarily dismissed in this discussion. The reasons for this failure have to be clearly understood in order to properly plan for a future for "MY India". For the present, we will evaluate the consequences of the Indian efforts in this direction on the legal framework. The efficacy of various other efforts at social justice, some that have been attempted and others that are possible will be considered extensively later.

Indian constitutionally mandated efforts in the quest for equality of outcomes rather than merely opportunities started with the directive principles of state policy in the constitution and the provision of reservations for some sections of the society in education, employment and legislatures. Efforts to reserve the commanding heights of the economy to the public sector followed. Since the constitution also provided "fundamental rights" to all citizens, there was an effort to legally challenge some of these measures of social justice as violating fundamental rights. To prevent these challenges from derailing the effort, a ninth schedule of the constitution was created and laws placed therein were beyond judicial rejection on the ground that they violate fundamental rights.

The reasonable and even noble idea that there are disadvantaged individuals and groups in the society that need to be supported even if so doing adversely effects the fundamental rights of those who are not so disadvantaged has been extrapolated to a point where every microscopic disadvantage (real or even imagined) is granted recognition in a court of law. Thus laws have been made by the representatives assuming that every tenant is a disadvantaged party in a dispute with an owner, that every employee will be potentially exploited by his manager, that every woman is disadvantaged when in conflict with

a male and so on. There is no question that certain groups are relatively disadvantaged, some of them severely disadvantaged. But by taking this emotional position that every minute disadvantage of such a group has to be compensated, a position that is routinely encouraged by the judiciary and the legislatures at every level, the legal system has completely broken down.

For example, one has the legislature making changes with retrospective effect. Consequently, the action of an individual becomes illegal after the event even though the individual had acted in accordance with law. Other laws place the burden of proof of innocence on the accused rather than the proof of guilt on the prosecutor.

This approach to problems results in an *ad hoc* modification of the ideas of civil and criminal jurisprudence something that has escaped the notice of the legal fraternity as well as the representatives and the lay public. In modern legal systems, a case in civil law is decided by preponderance of evidence. Convicting an individual under the provisions of criminal law requires that the guilt be established beyond any reasonable doubt. The basis for this distinction between the civil and criminal jurisprudence is the conviction that it is better for many guilty individuals to escape punishment rather than for one innocent person to be deprived of his fundamental right to liberty due to a conviction. Most Indians emotionally reject this basic principle.

No one India also seems to recognize the correlation between this *ad hoc* modification of the jurisprudence and the serious problems of legal delays and even corruption. The duration between a crime and the final judgment by the supreme court is sometimes twenty years. The government periodically releasing a large number of prisoners who have been imprisoned for durations longer than the maximum prison terms that could be imposed for the crimes they are alleged to have committed. Neither the courts nor the society are aghast that all these accused are entitled to the basic premise of being considered

innocent till they are proven guilty and that detention without trial is an imposition on their fundamental right of liberty. So just because we have decided that under certain conditions fundamental rights should not inhibit efforts at social justice, even the most fundamental right of life and liberty can be casually overlooked.

No one finds it amusing that a court finds after twenty odd years of litigation that an administrative decision to suspend an employee is not valid and orders the employer (usually a government department) to pay back wages for the entire period notwithstanding the fact that no work was performed. This is not a "compensation" or fine imposed on the individual who took the decision but a payment from public funds! It is the fundamental right of the employee to be employed! Thus, the employee demands that each and every administrative action must be proved beyond all reasonable doubt not to impinge on expansively defined fundamental rights. This automatically reduces the prospect of supervision or management to improve efficiency.

In spite of delays, courts routinely spend more time overseeing or questioning the performance of the government departments than on the pending legal cases. Thus, everything from measures to control malaria to using CNG for city transport becomes an immediate concern of the courts. Working of the board of control for cricket or the rules regarding admission of children to nursery classes in the schools deserve immediate attention of the courts. But the courts taking up cases which attract media attention have less time for other responsibilities.

The strange case of the ever increasing number of stray dogs on the roads of Delhi is the best example. They contribute to unhygienic conditions, injuries to the citizens and above all else to sleepless nights with their barking. But the courts egged on by the "dogooders" have decided that standards of humane practice implemented

in the rich western societies have to be followed. This being way beyond the financial capabilities of the civic authorities, the situation has worsened. That the courts think the rights of a person to feed stray dogs in the premises of an educational institution have priority over a person in custody for several years pending his trial forces one to exclaim that it is no longer a tragedy but a farce.

The systems created by the representatives also contribute significantly. For example, very high standards of city planning and housing were imposed by the Government in Delhi. The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) was to be the sole agency for a planned development. The Delhi Urban Arts Commission, a body completely beyond control by elected representatives and unconcerned with the financial cost of their proposals decides on city planning. The grandiose plans, out of touch with the reality of Indian conditions have contributed to the rampant illegality of construction in Delhi where ninety percent of houses are illegally modified. This is also a prime example of the system not permitting the dilution of standards in accordance with democratic decision making. The system is made so complex and centralized so that a small subunit cannot decide on its own building code!

This scramble to deliver perfect "justice" and accept every big and small problem as deserving judicial oversight has another negative consequences. Courts are sympathetic towards claims of administrative actions that impinge on an expanded set of fundamental rights of individuals or to public interest litigation to monitor the civil administration. But an administrator who attends to some job for fear of judicial supervision and penalty would ignore the rest of his responsibilities even more. So ultimately only those jobs get attention which are monitored by the courts. Courts which are concentrating on these "immediate" issues are contributing to the delays not only in the judicial process of "normal" cases but even in administrative actions. Further, this delay itself prompts people to resort to judicial scrutiny on

flimsy grounds to enjoy the benefits during the long delay to judicial pronouncements. For example, it is a sad reality that most rent contracts cannot be enforced in India thanks to the rent control acts which are supposed to benefit the weaker section namely tenants. Rich tenants routinely misuse this to trouble weaker owners! This has resulted in a demand for illegal muscle men who could evict the tenants. These groups of hoodlums subsequently morphed into political parties.

Similarly, the anti-dowry act was strengthened to the point where the party who was perceived as the stronger namely the male was expected to prove his innocence. It is common knowledge that while the genuinely deserving weak women has not really been protected, the law has been misused to harass many males. These are the unintended consequence of emotional meddling in matters of law! The root cause of the delays, namely the practicality and limited utility of the complex laws is never acknowledged.

The respect to each new claim of the risks, rights and public interest only ensures negligence and apathy and finally to lack of efficiency. The delays in the legal system become an attractive "legal" option for prolonging patently illegal activities. This in turn ensures that the gun, the bandh and the fast continue to be "legitimate" in the eyes of the society as though they are dealing with a colonial government and not a democratic government freely elected by themselves. This is one aspect of India that needs a clear reorientation and suggestions will be presented in later pieces when we discuss the future of "MY India"

Is Every Desirable Thing Possible?

The problems that one encounters at every turn in post-independent India are caused by the conflict between emotionally supported demands and reality. As in any modern democratic society, modern science is one justification for many demands. The second justification is based on claims of fair play and equality. Often both justifications are employed in tandem just as both the courts and the legislature are petitioned for redressal. For example, a demand for stringent limits on pesticide residues in soft drinks is often buttressed by scientific studies demonstrating that these cause cancers. Activism against corporal punishment is supported by modern psychological research on the harmful consequences.

Opposition to the government acquiring land for an industry would be based on environmental concerns as well as the rights of the tribal population to continue their traditional lifestyles. Advice of experts and current practice in advanced societies are both routinely accepted without question. The sad reality is that in most cases the strength of the science, its utility and practicability for the society is never rig-

ously examined. There is as much fear of the expert in the modern society as of the witch doctors in the ancient world.

The practical issues of implementation have to be considered if we desire to formulate specific programs with a possibility of success. Even when the demands are based on strong scientific evidence or genuine issues of inequity and unfairness, practicality has to specifically taken into consideration. In the Indian context, there is strong resistance to objections based on practicality which are seen as a disguised effort to preserve the status quo. This criticism is valid in many instances. Given that accomplishment of contemporary India to provide a semblance of equality and fairness to the disadvantaged individuals and groups has been patchy at best and pathetic in most cases, citing practicality as a limit appears to be inhuman.

Then again, conspicuous consumption and lavish life styles appear to nail the arguments of non-affordability as lies. Here as elsewhere, it is difficult for most Indians to concede that notional values of wealth cannot be appropriated for social causes. It is easy to find the cost of a share and to estimate the wealth of a majority stockholder from that! It is overlooked that the current price of the share is a consequence of the fact that only a few are available for purchase. If one tries to sell a majority of shares, there would be no buyers unless the price becomes practically zero. The wealth of the majority stock holder is not available for distribution!

However, the problems of giving a free hand to emotions are not merely financial. Implementation of measures out of touch with the technological capabilities of the society are mostly counter productive. For example, the precautionary principle has been a great support for many decisions in the advanced societies. This principle demands a guarantee of absolute safety. Science has established that pesticides in high concentration cause cancers. That prolonged exposure to low levels of pesticides also causes cancer cannot be scientifically

proven. However, as a precaution, much lower limits of pesticide residues are mandated in western societies. However, what is the meaning of enforcing at great cost limits on pesticide residues in bottled water and aerated drinks in India when the same limits cannot be enforced on other food items which are consumed in larger quantities?

Two other modern philosophies which have a large influence on western society are multiculturalism and post-modernism. Multiculturalism is a reaction to the unfair treatment of disadvantaged sections of society such as racial, linguistic and religious minorities, immigrants and other disadvantaged sections in societies despite "enlightenment policies of equality and freedom". It identifies desirable behaviors and modes of interaction between individuals of the society and demands their legal enforcement. It essentially converts individual courtesy which was usually restricted to the dominant groups into legally enforceable rights for the minorities and disadvantages sections. Post-modernism similarly highlights the failures of enlightenment and refuses to evaluate and criticize any social custom or practice.

But the both these philosophies have negative consequences ,even in the western societies, but these are often ignored by the proponents. An isolated individual or small group is always overwhelmed by a novel environment. Such an individual would find it difficult to adjust to the norms of the advanced society to which they have relocated. Relaxation of these norms is demanded since this could lead to their success and eventual integration into the mainstream. But when this relaxation is converted to legally enforceable rights and extended to larger groups and can and does become counter productive. The larger groups resist change and integration with the mainstream leading to ghettos, large scale friction, violent suppression of individuals not following the traditions etc. as confirmed by the Muslim groups in western democracies. Unfortunately, precautionary principle, multiculturalism and postmodernism have established themselves as ideologies and there is severe resistance to revisit their essential util-

ity. As usual, the failures are attributed to the limited application of the ideology and not to its failure.

I expect "MY India" to learn from the entire human experience and not be bogged down by either by tradition and nationalistic pride or blindly following the western societies. There is no alternative to critical examination on a case by case basis. Not everything desirable can be implemented. This may sound like an old fashioned religious and fatalistic acceptance. But it is an honest conservative assessment based on critical examination of human capabilities.

In charting a future for "MY India" it will be necessary not to be bamboozled by scientific claims or ideology. In balancing the claims of reward for merit with the demands of social justice or of individual freedoms against social responsibilities or of "efficient market economic solutions" with the societal consequences, there cannot be any consistent ideological solution. As we outline these major areas of societal concern in the next few presentations, the balance between conflicting claims will be assessed without any predetermined ideological positions. We will take into consideration, the strength of the science supporting the demands, availability of resources in the society to fulfill them and modifications required to the current decision making procedures in the set of essays on the future of "MY India".

The Quest For "Just Laws"

Every society dreams that the laws by which it is governed and the norms or practices of its members are "just". Sometimes they admit that the current laws and norms need improvement and believe that the society is honestly striving for this improvement. Traditionally, Semitic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) emphasized an eternal and hence just law, thus simplifying the problem to one of implementing the divine law. Post Renaissance, European societies began an independent quest for a "just" law. The emphasis was on rationality and questioning and thus the "secular law" emerged. Equality of individuals and the individual's right to independent action, limited only by the rights of others form the bedrock of secular law. Even in the European context, this is an unfinished agenda as the remnants of medieval rules that control the royalty in the UK or the recent efforts to outlaw discrimination based on race, gender or sexual orientation in some European societies demonstrate.

India has always been a half way house. Historically there was never one divine law. Accommodation between diverse and mutually

antagonistic laws and practices of castes, sub-castes and communities was necessary. Colonial rule introduced a western secular law as an addition to this entrenched multicultural milieu. In contemporary India, those with modern and socialistic world views largely embrace western ideas. However, even among these circles, secular rights are not automatically accepted as primary. For example, many of these avowed modernists support the Muslim Personal Law which restricts the freedom that would have been available to women under secular law.

Similarly, a majority of Indians are not very supportive of the modern ideas of "humane" punishment, for example abolition of the death penalty. Comments even in mainstream media bemoan the requirement for proof beyond all reasonable doubt as a hindrance to the deliverance of justice rather than viewing it as a basic protection of the rights of the individual. The media jubilantly participates in "witch hunting" in every presumed case of sexual harassment with the defendant being given no benefit of the doubt. One has to acknowledge that these cries for "crucify him" are a remnant of the medieval demand for revenge. The emphasis is on the crime for which someone is guilty. Apparently if the crime is heinous enough one may hang anyone whose neck suits the noose. Some even explicitly claim that in some cases the accused have to prove themselves innocent!

Many in India and not all of them belonging to the conservative Hindutva brigade call for severe and sometime medieval punishments. While the nationalistic brigade call for these severe punishments for "anti-national activities", the socialist groups call for such punishments for "anti-social activities". For that matter one cannot forget the first prime minister of free India calling for the black marketers to be hung on the nearest lamp post. Even those who swear by "scientific evidence" fail to accept the modern research which finds that such punishments help in the reformation of the accused or deter crime in the society.

A large part of the demand for change in laws of India may be termed loosely as a clamor to "do something", Irrespective of cautionary voices that the approach is not likely to succeed and often despite evidence that the efforts in the past have not delivered the desired results, "status quo", continuing with the rules as they are is considered as an abdication of responsibility or connivance with the perpetrators of the crimes.

Very good examples are the various laws enacted to address the very real problem of "dowry harassment". Dowry or financial demands made in an arranged marriage by the boy's family on the girl's family is a serious problem in contemporary India. There is evidence that in medieval India, as in many other pre-industrial cultures, "bride's price" system where the male had to pay for the bride was common. Irrespective of whether the phenomenon is recent or ancient, there is little doubt that dowry is an immense social problem. Physical violence, psychological trauma, abetting of suicide or even outright murder of the females are all reported.

Every one of these is a crime in the Indian penal code irrespective of whether it is associated with a dowry demand or not. However, special laws outlawing dowry were passed many decades ago. More recently, when the failure of these laws to eliminate the social evil was apparent, harassment was made a special criminal offence more or less demanding that the boy's family "prove themselves innocent". As expected, while the actual harassment of women for dowry has not ceased, a new avenue of harassment by the girl's party has become common. While even courts have commented on this, an admission that perhaps there are limits to what any government can do is the one thing missing in the Indian media. After all, one should remember that marital harassment is reported even in advanced western societies. Marriages are not "arranged" in these societies. The adult individuals make the choices independently and divorce is easy. Why one partner permits harassment by the other in such a situation is not an easy ques-

tion to answer. Neither simplistic arguments ascribing this to "patriarchal social norms" nor naïve arguments of "individual psyche" are very useful.

Similar is the case of the even more nauseating social practice of female foeticide or selective abortion of the girl child. India's population of about a billion is increasing at the rate of more than twenty million an year and various states report sex ratios of about 950 female children for thousand male children. This means that there are some half a million to a million female foeticides every year. Ultra-sonic or other medical procedures for determination of the fetal sex have obviously been used. Such prenatal determination has been outlawed, but this obviously has no impact whatsoever. More stringent laws and more severe punishment are being demanded. Clearly, this desire to do something by legal means is only for self satisfaction. The demands for more of the failed legal approach hides an unwillingness to make efforts to interact with the society and achieve local success.

This is not a polemic against laws; only about our tendency to think that every bad occurrence is ultimately due to bad laws or can even be corrected by new laws. What is required is implementation not new laws. Most of what is needed can emerge from simple ideas about individual freedom and responsibility. A law banning *sati* was needed in the early nineteenth century, but in a modern society, it is simpler to prosecute *sati* as murder or assisted suicide.

Is a separate law defining a minimum age for marriage needed? Sadly, we are unable to implement the law. If only we can implement the law, it is simple to accept the minimum age for marriage and the age for consent as the age at which a child becomes a major, responsible for his or her actions. Equality before law as a principle, would have simply lead to equal property rights for girls, something that is missing in Hindu laws on inheritance and Islamic divorce. We simply have special laws which are not enforced.

One thing is common in all cases. While the effort of modern secular law is to benefit the weaker party, despite claims of universal compassion, religious laws seldom benefit the weak! So while one sees every busybody in India proposing changes to the criminal procedure code, the far greater damage caused by these traditions are often brushed under the carpet. In the case of minority personal laws, the society bends over backwards. The lowest point was the parliamentary legislation following the supreme court decision in the Shah Bano case. The court ordered Muslim men to pay maintenance to destitute divorced wives beyond the period fixed by the Muslim Personal Law. It did not touch the unequal provisions of Muslim law and considered this a payment for a humane cause under the criminal procedure code. But even this small mercy was taken away by legislative action.

If "do something" is the demand for changing laws as a reaction to current events, the precautionary principle is the demand due to belief in the latest "scientific" research. These claims of dangers could be wide ranging; radiation from mobile phone towers, pesticide residues in imported fruits, violence in children who play violent video games and so on. Of course the choice of the target is always quite selective and mostly political. Thus the presence of a microscopic quantity of pesticide residue in the bottle of aerated water produced by a multinational company is more important than the sewerage that comes through the municipal water supply.

There are advantages in this choice. Trashing a multinational company gets the backing of socialists. The company can be forced by the courts and publicity to take some action. The twittering classes are most impressed about maintaining "international standards" ignoring both the limitations of the science* and the many other sources of pesticides, tea for example. It is much more difficult to hold a small scale industry or the municipal water supply to such standards!

* How Well Do We Know It (Chapter 10)

Other demands focus not on justiciable laws but norms to be followed in the public space. Forcing the use of politically correct language in everything from news broadcasts to sports commentaries is very common. Large media uproar highlight a slip of the tongue by any prominent individual. It is claimed that sections of the population, in particular minorities or weaker sections could be emotionally hurt and psychologically scarred. In western societies, this benefit does not extend to the religious who are advised not to be sensitive to atheist criticism and even ridicule. The slip of the tongue is seen as an indicator of latent psychological malice. The individual must be made to grovel or even condemned for life. Presumably news reports of atrocities not to speak of the legally sanctioned discrimination against the weaker individuals in the name of minority rights are not as dangerous. Once again the emphasis is for creating a sense of accomplishment for a cause not for actual improvement of society. That is a wall against which the advocacy groups have no wish to break their heads.

Actually laws and norms of democratic society have to balance mutually contradictory positions. Consider as a fairly trivial example, a male only club. Should such a club be allowed to function? Is the limitation of the membership to males a discriminatory practice that can be challenged in courts? Many clubs enjoy some kind of tax related benefits. Should these be discontinued for male only clubs? But this would make the tax rules more and more complex. What should society do if the club is a totally private group? Must members be shamed in public? Should one not elect a member of such a club to a legislature or other positions of power? But to do so in the absence of evidence of any actual wrongdoing hardly appears fair.

If this is a trivial example, what about individuals who have reservations about homosexuality? Should they be suspect even without evidence of wrong doing? What of individuals who for religious reasons may not approve of homosexuality, but have not actually harmed anyone? Other complex societal issues are equally challeng-

ing. Currently in India scholarships restricted to brahmin boys are not legally barred, but should this be allowed? There is anecdotal evidence that Muslims have difficulty in finding rented accommodation. Should house renting be compulsorily secular? Will legal restrictions even work and at what cost?

Another facet to the conflict regarding the modernization of laws and norms in contemporary India cannot be lost sight of. In almost every modern western country, either partner in the marriage "contract" can demand and obtain a divorce without the consent of the other partner. It is easy to support easy divorce in view of the "inhuman cruelty" of a forced continuation of the marriage. But easy divorce has meant a larger number of single parent families who need larger support from the government safety net. Even more surprisingly, easy divorce has not eliminated inhuman marital violence in these advanced societies while historically such examples have initiated the desire for civil divorce rules! Such negative consequences are recognized but ignored in the west due to the dominance of individualism as a philosophy.

In contemporary India courts are bound by law to seek reconciliation and the modern segment of the society, in line with their western outlook frown at these restrictions as inefficient. But if the laws were made as liberal as in the west the horrible consequences for the vast "male dominated" non westernized women of the society can be imagined.

Continuing the traditional Muslim divorce laws, has created a reverse problem. These laws were more liberal than those prevalent in other medieval societies. Traditional societal norms imposed some restrictions on the males. Apart from these laws going against current norms of equality, Muslim males in twenty first century urban India are not restricted by the old norms. Consequently, the laws have become convenient tools for abusing the weaker female partner and the

real situation is worse than medieval. Liberalization of laws has to be evaluated in the context of the reality of contemporary societies.

In addition to the fascination of the latest modern laws of the west as a means of transforming the Indian society, liberalization of the economy has made market efficiency analysis of social problems popular. In particular the rational efficiency arguments of economics are employed to question social laws like prohibition. These cousins of the free market arguments advocate total repeal of these restrictions. Neither tragic deaths due to illicit liquor nor efficiency arguments take into consideration the benefits of prevented tragedies.

In the India's male dominated society, money not spent on drinking will be available to the family! In all social issues one has a problem of efficiency and scale. Opium use was known in China as was slavery in Africa. But large scale, efficient markets caused overwhelming social tragedies in both places.

Similarly, balancing the restriction of individual freedoms for providing special powers to police and the tragedies of a terrorist attack is very difficult. One cannot also lose sight of the recent spurt of western laws against terrorism, that violate norms of freedom in those societies. The limited success of these compromises in preventing terrorist attacks is rarely admitted. Hopefully "My India" can accept the spirit of President Kennedy's remark that no security can be foolproof and that if someone desperately wants to kill the president he will. Can we accept the truth that you cannot stop individual acts of terrorism and that diluting the fundamental norms of the society is neither desirable nor useful? Hopefully, "MY India" will lead the world.

In addition to a need for intellectual analysis on a case by case basis, lack of any democratic basis for much of the decision making in contemporary society has to be recognized. Media fumes at the agitations by the illiterate riff-raff representing religious fundamentalists

and applauds those by the ultra liberal champion of western norms. In focusing on these opposing protests regarding the celebration of valentine's day, women drinking in pubs, art exhibits, sending of girls to school, dress or morality codes, we fail to appreciate how the groups in power have non-democratically prevented a method for addressing these concerns.

Why listen only to modern liberals? For example, why should they alone have despotic power to decide the rules for the burqa and the bikini in public space. If the burqa can be derided as a symbol of dominance of the patriarchal society so can the bikini be viewed as a demeaning concession to the male libido and as a commercialization of women. There is as much pressure by the "fashion elite" on the modern girl to show off in a bikini as there is on the traditional Muslim girl to cover herself up in a burqa. It is not my case that the morality brigade has a right to impose their views. But why are only the "enlightened" empowered to guide the censor board and decide what is "acceptable taste"? Should such norms be national, provincial or local? We will consider later, the mechanisms I propose so that "My India" could resolve these conflicts peacefully.

Clearly the situation in India is a complex and confusing. However this is hardly surprising. In a democracy the laws are a compromise between various groups. For example, most people in the UK did not support the recent calls for extending the laws of blasphemy to cover insults to Islam. Most people are satisfied that no one has been actually convicted of the medieval crime of blasphemy against the Christian religion for two hundred years but are not also willing to scrap the laws altogether. Democratic compromises often result in such strange occurrences. My India is only marginally compatible with a secular rule of law. Sometimes genuine problems are brushed under the rug. At other times changes are made in haste and without verifying if they can be implemented properly or if there are negative consequences. The grudging support to basic principles modern jurispru-

dence, proof beyond reasonable doubt, fundamental rights and humane punishments has already been highlighted.

For a democratic society to function efficiently, one has to recognize that the balance between what is advocated, what is desired by the majority and what is practically feasible has to be decided on a case to case basis. Being bamboozled by tradition, claims of scientific knowledge or plaintive cry for universal justice does not help. If one starts conceding every little claim of disadvantage, discrimination or hurt emotions of minority groups, one runs into calls for respecting the traditional values or sentiments of the majorities to which the governments often surrender. For example, having surrendered to Muslim fundamentalists in the Shah Bano case, the prime minister with a four fifths majority in the parliament connived to unlock the gates of the Babri Masjid and perform a *shilanyas* or laying of foundation stone there as a concession to the communalists of the majority religion. The pseudo secularists refuse to acknowledge that these thoughtless actions complicated the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid imbroglio. The biased media refuses to highlight this since the majority has always to be blamed and the minority pampered.

In India the Marxist socialist intellectuals routinely demonize the majority as Fascist. For this reason every quasi-intellectual effort to break the society into small mutually antagonistic groups is strenuously supported as they prevent the formation of a majority. The slippery slope argument is employed to prevent any argument. These views dominate the intellectual space and down to the smallest level the "progressive socialistic scholars" are dismissive of any challenge to their views. The failure to oppose the current dominant socialistic idiom has been a major contributor to the sad reality of India. To secure its future, "MY India", has to balance demands and aspirations for just laws against the possibilities and affordability.

Social Justice Demands And Implementation

One issue with the support of an unquestionable democratic majority in India is the provision of reservations, measures which in the American context are termed policies of affirmative action. A vast majority of Indians feel that reserving part of the admissions to educational institutions and recruitment to government jobs to candidates belonging to specific castes or segments of the society is absolutely necessary to achieve the constitutionally mandated egalitarian society. "Dalits", people belonging to castes that have been historically oppressed by the high caste Hindus were initially provided reservations in elected legislatures in addition to educational institutions and employment. Many of these measures were expected to last only ten years, reflecting an unrealistic expectation that independence would rapidly usher in an egalitarian socialistic heaven. Neither indefinite extension of these provisions nor expansion to mitigate many other economic and social handicaps was anticipated.

Sixty odd years after the initial measures were included in the constitution, reservations have been expanded in diverse ways. Reser-

vations have been made for backward castes, religious minorities, women, physically handicapped and occasionally for economically backward individuals. In addition to claims of historical injustices, which cannot be quantified or compared, the measures are justified sometimes by unreliable small scientific and statistical studies of educational or financial backwardness of the families and sections. The supreme court of India tried to limit the total reservations to 50% but this is resented and even bypassed in some cases, taking advantage of the very long legal delays that have been discussed earlier in a different context. The change from a socialistic to market economy has resulted in demands for reservations in private sector duly supported by anecdotal evidence or investigative journalism exposing discrimination in private sector recruitment.

To be sure, the overwhelming support for reservations in India can be dismissed as the consequence of identity politics and formation of vote banks in a democratic society. It is quite logical to say that the support of a group or caste or community in elections would be easily obtained by offering reservations. One finds that the support for the demands is purely sectarian. Members of a group demand reservations for themselves and for no one else. Regretfully, even the minute humanistic support to demands for other than one's own group that existed in the early years of independence, with at least some members of the dominant groups supporting reservations for the dalits has largely evaporated.

The new demands for reservations are hindered primarily by antagonistic interests and mutual suspicions among the various groups. Thus despite the large democratic support for the reservation policies, electoral success has eluded the groups with the shrillest demands for enhanced or universal reservations. The lack of trust and mutual suspicion which has limited an even more intemperate implementation of reservations has also inhibited any serious discussion of the creamy layer or elimination of individuals belonging to the handicapped sec-

tions, but who individually have enjoyed both financial security and a measure of social respect because of highly educated parents.

Today merit lists based on the same criteria of marks obtained in examinations, interview performance, etc. are prepared for each of the reserved categories separately. There is little recognition that employing this procedure in the reserved categories ensures that individuals belonging to the reserved category, but with better socioeconomic indicators like parental education or wealth will corner the benefits. The emotional satisfaction that "our person" is benefited has prevented highlighting the undesirable consequence of reservations as they are implemented today.

Efforts have been made to subdivide the reservations, particularly for backward classes into smaller segments and categorizing some as "most backward". But these efforts are viewed with suspicion as attempts at dividing the democratic support for reservations themselves. Unfortunately, in this cacophony of mutual recriminations and accusations, several important features of contemporary India are not objectively examined. Highlighting these would help our delineation of a future course of action for "MY India" rather than entering into this quagmire of trying to prove the usefulness or limitations of reservation policies.

Many claim that Indian history was all about caste, that the caste system was a form of slavery and the historically suppressed segments of society deserve long lasting and "reparation" for the crimes committed by the forefathers of the contemporary forward castes. It would surprise the strong proponents of these views to recognize how similar claims of handicaps and unwillingness to face competition pervades even those who argue against reservations and in favor of merit in contemporary India. Most Indians actually lack respect for the idea of merit! Thus, many policies and procedures adopted in India are not recognized for what they really are, undeserved reservations.

Despite all talk of India being a single country, all states routinely restrict admissions to educational institutions and local government jobs to "sons of the soil" or "locals". The rules for "recognizing" some one as a local are not uniform across different states and are often very restrictive sometimes requiring ten years of education within the state! This is a reservation that is never even questioned. Most government jobs in India from the IAS and IFS officers, the so called backbone of the system, to the semi-skilled helper come with "assessment" promotions. There are claims that three or more "promotions" are a justifiable and justiciable demand of the job prospects. But an assessment promotion actually reserves the superior position to those who are already in service. There is no claim that the job requires experience that is not available to others. If such experience is in fact an essential requirement for the job, an open selection would not really matter.

Inbreeding, recruiting people who have studied in an institution for academic positions in the same place is more often the rule rather than an exception even in the best academic institutions in India. Thus, in most academic institutions in India, alumni form a very significant part of the faculty. This practice is frowned upon in the best institutions of the world which actively prefer outsiders, so as to get people with "newer ideas and different approaches". In India, even at the highest level of academic scholarship, championing merit masks an underlying reluctance to be open to competition with another institution or organization. This "reservation" is not even legal! This demonstrates the hidden insincerity of most of those who are championing merit.

In reality merit and competitiveness have as many negative connotations in India as racial eugenics have in the western world. Reservation has now seeped into the India psyche as a mind set. If everything was caste in an earlier era, now everything is only "nurture". Merit is merely the availability of resources. The two other fac-

tors that contribute towards worldly success, an innate ability and random luck are ignored as politically incorrect. This is not very surprising. The success of those with "strong family connections" in Indian politics is recognized, but the blame is easily laid on the "uneducated masses". India exhibits significant hereditary success in classical music and films apart from the medical and legal professions. That we ignore the nepotism in all this is a sad reality. Not recognizing the "reservation" benefits one has enjoyed through systemic or other means may be a common human limitation. The pessimistic defeatism and narrative of victimhood leading to unending demands for reservations is consequently understandable. But all this justification does not make it right. At the same time, experience over sixty years does not provide any confidence in the current reservation policy as an effective means for helping the handicapped let alone creating an egalitarian society. How to return to a humanistic framework where individuals with physical, financial or other handicaps can be cheerfully compensated is definitely an important task for defining the future of "MY India".

The foremost among the ignored issues in the context of reservations is the role of supply and demand in the job market. In the early years of British India, those who studied in the newly created schools with "western education" had an advantage over those who studied in the *gurukuls* or *madararasas*. Thus a person who studied up to the eighth class was assured of a clerical job in the government with a "pension for life". The cornering of this avenue by the forward caste brahmins created more caste animosity than their historical categorization as the "gods on earth". But as education became more and more widespread, the minimum educational requirement for a clerical job has gone on increasing and today even a masters degree is not sufficient.

As the newspapers keep reporting, many masters degree holders continue to aspire for low level government jobs that require much lower education qualification. A typical example is a post graduate applying for a primary school teacher's post or engineering graduates

applying for a lineman's position in the railways. If education means anything at all, those with a higher education have an advantage over the others. It is not that the job requires these qualifications. It is merely impossible to have an objective criterion for selection that eliminates them from the contest. Interestingly, a new form of reservation had to be implemented, barring those with higher qualifications. For example, some governments banned candidates with a B.Ed. degree applying for a teacher's job in primary schools since the competition with those with the primary teacher training certificate was not considered fair.

In the context of reservations, the creamy layer which can afford to invest for more education and superior degrees will obviously corner the benefits. The mismatch between supply and demand is a continuing saga. Students who have studied in English medium schools dominated the admissions to the prestigious Indian Institutes of Technology and the civil services several decades ago. As more and more parents recognized the advantages, the numbers of "convent educated children", those who studied in English medium schools swelled. Then coaching for the IIT entrance became a necessity since merely studying in the English medium schools was not sufficient. As the numbers increased further, the examination had to be made extremely difficult.

The toughness is irrelevant to the competence required for doing a bachelor's degree course! Currently some fifty thousand have to be selected for admission the various prestigious engineering colleges from among several million aspirants. If the exam is not extremely tough, too many aspirants would get 100% marks and then the selection process fails. As the numbers in the coaching classes increases, more and more intense "coaching" becomes necessary. Hilariously, despite the coaching, chances of getting the coveted seat decreases. As an interesting demonstration of this scenario, at the time of inception, a now famous coaching institute offered refunds if their students were not admitted to an IIT. This led to large immediate demand for the institute but they stopped this policy very soon, when they started ad-

mitting more and more students for their "special coaching". The tough entrance examination is neither a conspiracy against the disadvantaged nor an idiosyncrasy of the IIT faculty. It is a statistical necessity given the mismatch between the number of seats available and number of aspirants. The tough exam has only one justification. It is a socially acceptable objective criterion for selection.

The increasing standards of requirement either of a master's degree for a clerical job or of a rigorous coaching for IIT selection increase the role of the financial status of the parents. It also exacerbates the differences between the performance of the "reserved" and "general" candidates selected for admission in the entrance tests. Highlighting the selection of a "reserved" candidate with 30% marks and the rejection of a "merit" candidate with 90% generates a lot of media commentary. But it ignores a complex reality. Tougher the examination, larger the difference between the best and the average. But this tough examination is not needed in the first place. People who have not gone through this filtration get admitted in the not so prestigious schools, but get the same degrees and perform similar jobs in the economy! In any case, the continuous increase in the financial investment required for being competitive means that our efforts at achieving egalitarianism through reservations will not be successful. The recent effort of the civil society in Delhi resulted in reserving 25% seats for the economically weaker sections in the "prestigious schools of Delhi". But this will not serve much practical purpose. Merely studying in these schools is not a passport for high paying jobs.

A look at the reasons for the attractiveness of admissions to these prestigious institutions is also useful. There are really two reasons. One is the early bird advantage. As a course of study is introduced, there is a strong expectation of finding jobs with the same level of financial remuneration as the engineering and management graduates are getting without having to clear the extremely competitive examinations. This is true of the courses such as hotel management, fash-

ion technology or graphic design that have become quite popular in the recent past. For the same reason new specializations like environment, nano-materials or financial derivatives in established avenues like law, engineering or management become very popular.

Despite these new entrants and their heavy advocacy in the media, the competition for the IITs and IIMs remains outrageously tough. The reason is the extraordinarily high salaries being offered to the students graduating from these institutions which get publicized in the media. One suspects the placement offices in these institutions must be restricting access to those companies which offer these astronomical salaries and thereby contribute to the fame of their institutions. These campus placements also concentrate on the "better" institutions. This is as true of the advanced technology company that hires a few of the brightest IIM or IIT graduates as of the IT giants like WIPRO or INFOSYS that recruit in large numbers.

These commercial organizations are not in any illusion that their campus recruiters have the ability to separate the wheat from the chaff. They are banking on the tough filtering process through which these students have emerged. It is a known fact that the high technology companies in India do not even have a process to attract the Indian students who have studied in the US Universities which offer admittedly superior training! They take the easy route of filling their needs from the best Indian institutes without having the trouble of actually evaluating the worth of the individuals. This completes the feedback loop. Everyone in India is after admission in these institutions and as there are far too many applicants, the selection is through a tough examination. As the media highlights the recruitments and salaries there is a demand for reserved admissions despite low marks and this creates its own resentment.

Actually these news snippets of the large salaries being offered hide as much as they reveal. Usually the highest placement sal-

ary is highlighted. Rarely the average salary of those offered a placement is mentioned. This is usually a fraction of the highest figure. But the median placement salary, the minimum salary that is offered to fifty percent of the students is never revealed. In most of the common engineering colleges where IT placements dominate, this figure is exactly zero since fifty percent of all students are not placed! Even in the more prestigious engineering colleges, the students in the bottom ten percentile end up with recruitment in the IT companies as do some students from the so called "ordinary" colleges". Thus the actual financial rewards obtained by the student after all the effort and sacrifice varies very significantly.

The gini coefficient is a well known statistical measure of variability in income or wealth of the citizens of a country. In an imaginary country where there is perfect equality, the coefficient will be zero and in a true medieval kingship where everything is in principle owned by the king the coefficient is one. A qualitative idea of the gini coefficient for specific professions can be guessed. The lawyer's profession for example would have a high gini. While the most prominent lawyer in the supreme court of India charges tens of thousands per appearance in the court, a large number of lawyers serve as notaries in front of the sub-registrar's office and earn a pittance. In contrast the school teacher's profession has a much lower gini. At worst, many teachers in the unorganized private schools get a quarter of the government school teachers and no one gets astoundingly huge salaries.

Sports as a profession will have an extremely high gini. Winners take all in such professions and the losers have no compensation. Fashion design or acting are other professions where a small minority get huge financial success while the failures are left on the wayside. Engineering as a profession has a much lower gini. Very few make it to become owners of large technology companies, but most manage to have a modest financial income. Comparatively business management has a higher gini, the higher level managers in general have better

salaries than the engineers. Professions with high gini get more media attention and the corresponding educational qualifications are more sought after. But the repercussions of failure are less severe for those students with financial support. They can afford to lose the additional resources that have been spent in acquiring these qualifications.

In the Indian context, the extreme competitiveness of the admission process for the IITs has been successfully countered by those with resources. They now sponsor the education of their children in even more prestigious institutions in USA. It is also pertinent to note that many of the high gini professions are open only to self employment or in the unorganized sector where we cannot implement reservations. One can reserve the job of a doctor in a government hospital but what about that of a lawyer?

As the society advances the training required to get these financially lucrative jobs also becomes more arduous. One has reasons to be genuinely concerned. Are sizable sections of the society handicapped by the lack of training at the early age to prevent their ever catching up? Is it realistic to expect those with disadvantaged life styles to go through an extended period of training and compete with their brethren with superior resources? But if one begins with a demand for a perfectly egalitarian start, one ends in a chicken and egg conundrum. Ultimately, one has to concede reservations are a balm to our social conscience, not a realistic mechanism for egalitarianism or social justice. One reaches the limits of human capabilities. Clearly reservations are not the major factor in making the society more egalitarian. Thus the plan for the future of "MY India" would need to acknowledge the possible limitations of the social mechanisms available for us and perhaps concentrate on what best can be achieved in practice rather what is conceptually or emotionally desirable.

Wealth Creation And Sharing

Most economists, now that the challenge from the Marxist school is muted at best, often begin a discussion of economics with the fable of the little red hen who works and makes cakes. Everyone else now wants a share though they declined to help the hen while the cakes were being made. The fable of the industrious ant which works and accumulates while the grasshopper simply flirts around not caring for the morrow and suffers in the end is also popular. One can be called a cynic to imagine the grasshopper winning a lottery ticket. However, as we shall see in this vignette, luck is a big component of success in the modern economy.

In any case, all this fails to ask a simple question. Is a man prepared to be the ant? Milton said God would accept that "they also serve who only stand and wait". Why should not man? It is never wise to disown human empathy. Much of the progress we see in human behavior is a consequence of empathy. The standard answer of economists is that this empathy should lead to individual charity and not government schemes. Sole reliance on private charity has the same

limitation that a barter economy has namely coincidence of wants. The elementary economic lesson says that exchanging apples and oranges is less efficient than buying and selling for money. The chances of a seller of apples who wants oranges meeting a seller of oranges who wants apples is low. But the great economists do not admit that providing a social safety net may be better than individual charity for the same reason. They presumably assume that a seeker of alms should pay with the effort to find a philanthropist!

Equally crazy is the "all property is theft" thundering of Proudhon. One has to recognize that the innate empathy of an individual will ensure that he will share a lot with his family, a bit with his friends and not that much with the unknown countrymen. This can change, not many years ago man shared only with his extended family. Gradually this circle has expanded. Sometimes idealists build structures without recognizing the current reality. The current problems with the European Union are caused by the contemporary German being unwilling to share as much with the non German as with a German. Ultimately, most humans resent being forced to share, but few will tolerate living happily as an island in the midst of misery. Equality between a man earning a rupee and one earning a million is impossible, but one has to evaluate how much equality a society desires and how much can be the practically achieved.

In order to generate economic proposals for the future of "MY India" balancing encouragement of wealth creation and redistribution is essential. The old Hindu sages advised the king to treat the kingdom like a cow. Feeding and taking care of the cow is essential to get a good supply of milk. True; wealth has to be created before it can be shared. An assessment of the current economic situation is a necessary component of the present discussion on the state of "MY India".

The acceptance of a socialistic model of development and a distrust of the market mechanism and the private industry is very wide-

spread in Indian intelligentsia. The Marxist analysis of entirely blaming colonial exploitation for the backwardness of India and the rise of England has been a major cause for the attraction of the Soviet Russian model of development. While Gandhi is revered, his economic model of largely self sufficient villages was ignored, even by his protégé, Jawahar Lal Nehru. At the same time, there is extreme reluctance to accept that the Gandhi's ideal village never existed, that aristocratic exploitation was horrible and most importantly, that an agrarian society is poor by definition. Thus there is no realistic examination and countering Green criticism. The breast beating that colonial rule prevented our modernization fails to acknowledge how much we resist modernization even now. There was simply no "modernized elite" in India till the justly maligned colonial masters created one.

Not very surprisingly independent India decided that the public sector was to be commanding the heights of the economy. For example, the soviets are praised for having helped to set up the integrated steel plants while the west "refused". Today the small but vocal market fundamentalists point out that entry of the private sector into steel sector was restricted. In reality, chance of making a profit were low and so the private sector, both Indian and foreign was not interested. The only beneficiary of the government owned steel plants was Tata Steel which could happily sell at the higher prices fixed to aid the public sector steel plants without modernization!

It is nice to dream that those old days of the command economy, with its emphasis on national pride, import substitution, derisively labeled the "license, quota, permit raj" has irrevocably ended with the opening of the Indian economy in the last twenty five years. But continual demands for more "liberalization" are grudgingly (if at all) approved by the government. This leads to comments about the short sighted political compulsions. The very mention of political compulsions is an admission that most Indians are not convinced of the mantra of liberalization and the policies are not democratically acceptable.

As seen earlier, Indians have reservations in accepting many other features of the western secular democracies. It has to be faced that India is a reluctant free market and the partial opening was forced by circumstances. One talks about prime minister Man Mohan Singh as the architect of liberalization. But he was reversing his own policies as the erstwhile Governor of Reserve Bank. There is no record of his having admitted that he was wrong earlier! Even he is only a partial convert! Actually, as we shall discuss presently, the real problems facing economic progress of India are not due to the lack of liberalization nor will they be addressed by further doses of that medicine.

The post independence socialistic efforts certainly contributed towards creating a middle class in the country. One consequence is the huge public debt that has to be borne by the current and future governments, eating into the tax revenues and restricting the efforts to help those in real need. More importantly, technological progress has ensured that the middle class declines to use many government services while continuing to accept government jobs. The best examples are the government schools. There are a several hundred or even thousand applicants for a vacant teacher's job in a government school. These very teachers do not admit their children in the schools where they teach! The lack of middle class, educated parents means less pressure on the teachers to perform and further lowering of the standards of these schools.

Similarly, government employees largely disdain to use the facilities of the government hospitals and have slowly altered the rules to enable them to avail services at private medical hospitals with the government paying the bills. As long as there was no competition, the middle class patronized Doordarshan and All India Radio just as government schools and hospitals were used in an earlier generation. These are no longer popular with the middle class. Today these organizations struggle to justify their expenditure. The political parties preserve their soviet era world view and consider them as useful propaganda tools.

Technology has made several other services redundant. With extensive mobile communications, writing letters has become a lost habit and telegraphy has of course become a fossil technology. Further the current middle class would prefer the so called efficiency of the courier services turning a blind eye to the service conditions of most of those employed there! Most government departments have "outsourced" their security, sanitary and horticulture jobs. Once again, those currently performing these services do not enjoy the perks and pensions of the regular government servants.

There are many indirect subsidies provided to the Government servants that are quite often invisible. These are justified as necessary to make the government jobs "attractive" though one look at the number of candidates who apply for each advertised job makes it clear that such incentives are unnecessary! These range from subsidized land for specialized schools to clubs and recreational facilities. Other government expenditures are demanded to support individuals such as sportsmen or artists (mostly middle class) who contribute to the Indian image on a world stage. Not included here are investments in infrastructure which are notionally public, but predominantly used by the middle and upper classes for example airports or museums.

The drag of the of these entitlements has to be seen in the context of the limited tax revenue available. The main problem is the low median income in India. Much of the population is too poor to pay any tax. While the idea of increasing the taxes on the rich appears to be attractive and dominated the views of the successive finance ministers for decades, the benefits are purely notional. The quantum of additional resources generated after paying increased costs of collection is not significant.

The most important problem that has to be factored into the plans for the future of "MY India" is the formation of self sufficient islands of affluence, gated communities that are largely independent

of the government services. As we saw in the earlier paragraphs, advancing technology is a factor in this process. As such groups expand, people enjoying these privileged life styles, compete with those outside who do not. This exacerbates the inequality problem that was sought to be addressed by reservations. Ironically, the formation of these closed communities of luxury mirrors the formation of minority ghettos in another social context. Even the old ideas that ultimately the city is dependent on the village at least for food are no longer really true. For example, thanks to free trade, Australian apples replace Shimla apples. Even if there is an increase in cost, (quite often trade results in lower prices) it is easily borne. The real problem with the earlier efforts at a planned economy are more with these entitlements and with the work culture than with planning per se.

Universally, organization of labor is a necessary evil. Trade unions are necessary to prevent exploitation and enhance the bargaining power of the individual employee. But, unions resist strong work culture and efficiency since more workers means stronger unions. Formation of the islands of prosperity is similarly a necessity despite the negatives identified above. They are the engines of growth. This complexity has to be kept in mind while devising the future plans.

Medieval Indians were always conscious of the possibility of the king confiscating their savings on one pretext or another. This medieval culture of hiding the wealth from the king has continued unabated. The pious hopes that reducing the Income tax rate from the socialistic 90% to the liberal 30% would reduce tax evasion have remained unfulfilled. Periodic amnesty for black money has not fared any better. Tax compliance is very low.

To hide his wealth, the average Indian values land and gold as the most attractive investments. Even very poor Indians tend to buy small quantities of gold and given the thousand million population, the averaged annual import of about 500 tons (or 500 million grams)

of gold for each of the last twenty years is quite understandable. Economists and politicians may bemoan this locking up of capital in an unproductive investment, but the gold holding is distributed over a large population and there is every likelihood that restrictions would only lead to smuggling as the experience in the socialistic era attests.

Real estate is a much larger destination of both black money and unproductive investment. An Indian invests in real estate not for rents, but for capital appreciation which in urban centers is significantly higher than inflation. In most cases the commercial cost of acquiring a property is completely unrelated to the possible rent that one can hope to receive. There is no depreciation to cover the repair or eventual replacement of the houses and shops. In recent years, the debate on foreign direct investment in retail trade has become strongly polarized. The opponents highlight possible harmful consequences to small merchants and shops while the proponents claim benefits to rural agricultural producers by way of cold storage and other methods to reduce waste.

However, the real and hidden reason for the advocacy is the anticipated capital appreciation of location with these "attractive" commercial shops. Since only a small fraction of Indians can afford to shop in these chains, the investment in cold storage will at best cover the small fraction of fruits and vegetables needed for these buyers. Then again, these non-processed food items would be a small fraction of the merchandise sold in those stores. In any case, any newly opened shop will not generate enough revenue to cover interest on capital invested. The shop is commercially viable only when one takes into consideration the appreciation of its cost when sold!.

The local authorities notify a presumed cost of properties on which registration charges have to be paid when they are bought. However in most cases the "market" rates are much higher and the difference leads to transfer of black or unaccounted money! In many cases,

these sales and purchases are informal! This is the financial consequence of the court delays discussed in the earlier vignette. There is no fear of not having the "proper registration" since any effort to take possession takes too long!

In any case, in India it is not only the politicians who renege on a poll promise. No one bats an eyelid in renegeing on a contract. Just as an example, some ninety percent of middle class housing in Delhi has unauthorized alterations and constructions while the owners have promised in writing not to do so. In the current context of generation and accumulation of black money, these are unfortunate consequences of some well meaning actions as discussed earlier. Clearly an entirely new approach to black money is a necessary component of a program for the future of "MY India".

Another contentious issue relevant to the creation of wealth in contemporary India is the issue of land acquisition. There are two major components of this. One is the use of forest land and the rights and livelihood of tribal people. The land is usually acquired for industrial development. The second is the acquisition of urban or semi-urban land for urban projects. Sadly, there is more opposition against the acquisition of forest land for genuine economic development than against the unjust acquisition of land under the so called public-private participation model.

Opposition to exploitation of forest land is extremely strong partly because the left, having been defeated in the attempt to make the public sector a commanding force of the economy, has joined hands with the environmental brigade. As in the case of the agitation against the presence of microscopic quantities of pesticides in colas, the agitation appears justified to many because of the hidden animosity towards multinational companies. Not that environmental concerns should be neglected. But some bitter truths have to be faced. There can be never any industrial development without damaging the eco-

system. If one begins to examine minutely, every ecosystem is unique, so one can always argue on that basis.

Contrary to popular nonsense talk, the tribal way of life is sustainable only when the numbers are small. When too many tribals begin to collect forest produce the forest is degraded as fast as when an industry is set up. Unfortunately the human population will increase. Quite apart from inefficiency and exploitation, the tribal societies in India cannot be independent. The economic links to the rest of the country result in a trickle of food and medical services to residents of the forests. The rest of the country is certainly not treating them fairly but the population increase will be all the larger when we humanly provide the minimum assistance of food and health care. It is a more sensible policy to encourage and assist their migration to the modern world. If one goes back in time everyone's ancestor was a tribal. The advantage of agriculture was the ability to store food for at least a year or more and to sustain a larger population.

The leftists, having been demoralized by the failure of their model of economic growth try to resist the economic development and demand a middle class living to all tribal as a compensation. This is an impossibility. Failure to use the natural resources with arguments of ecology and tribal welfare is more harmful to the tribal population itself. It is not surprising that provinces with the highest tribal population have highest poverty rates even by India's appalling standards.

There is a need for a general safety net and not only for the tribal poor. There are more poor people outside of the forests, even if the percentage of poverty is lower. Commercial and technological development is the only way one can generate the tax revenues needed for a universal safety net. At the same time, a safety net matching the standards applicable in the west cannot be implemented in Indian conditions. Not only will it be economically unsustainable, even if the systems of monitoring and control are put in place at great cost, they

cannot be operated successfully in the long run. Sometimes it may be better not to indulge in fancy high technology approaches in the Indian context.

While the opposition to industrialization and forest land usage is mostly misguided, urban land acquisition as implemented today is a complete scam. In some sense it is even worse than the scams that are reported regarding the auctioning of public property like spectrum for communication or even coal. In the name of private public partnership, land is being acquired by the state and given to selected private parties who develop part of the land for public use by building a road or airport for example and retain the remaining for their own commercial exploitation. No wonder that there is extreme resentment about this. While courts are considering these cases, there does not seem to be any questioning of the basic truth that this process is simply unjust! Land can be acquired for public purposes after just compensation is paid, not transferred to another private party for exploitation. But then a few decades ago, the ministers in India conducted loan melas and distributed loans without security from the deposits of nationalized banks without recognizing that once again the depositors owned these deposits.

Another feature of the current economy is the lack of distinction between real economic activity and gambling. Trading in the market over time scales much smaller than those required for a fruitful economic activity, (a few days to a few years) constitute gambling. The problem is not merely that gambling exists, but the scale at which it exists. Speculative gambling in commodity markets is a great example. If the price of a basic commodity doubles and returns to normal due to speculation, not only has a lot of money changed hands, productive enterprises may be simply destroyed with consequent liabilities for the social net! The earlier socialistic fear of hoarding was largely notional. Besides losses due to damage and pilferage it is really costly to create and maintain large scale storage facilities. How-

ever thanks to modern computerized trading, commodity speculation is a major problem. Any efforts to totally ban gambling or other efforts to earn without any productive outcome will certainly fail or create a regimented society that is undesirable for other reasons. But there has to be efforts to discourage these. Free trade is not always beneficial. The stress on free trade ignores the necessity of a country which as a political unit must provide a social net.

It has to be recognized that market efficiency, market demonizing and planned economy demonizing are all myths. Some of the problems outlined above are the consequence of emotional commitment to one or the other of these myths. As discussed in my earlier book*, economic science cannot guide any better than simple rationality. The economy has to be managed to ensure that balance between wealth creation and creating the desired social net, which is a form of redistribution. Thus there are several key issues to be decided. Since a competitive public sector is a myth, division of responsibilities between public and private sectors and organs of democracy is necessary. It is necessary to accept that protection of weak cannot be used as an arbitrary limitation of fundamental rights. These are not capricious western inventions for exploitation. The action plans have to be devised not with an ideology, but with practicality as the basic goal. That alone will lead to a practical program for successful economic plan for the future of "MY India", for auctioning public goods like coal to spectrum, for a sensible balance between taxation and distribution and above all for ignoring cross subsidization and concentrating on creating a proper social net.

* How Well Do We Know It (Chapter 12, 15)

Undisciplined Individuals And Reluctant Democrats

There are two attributes common to all Indians, cutting across the many divisions of caste, community religion, language and economic well being. Indians are undisciplined individuals and reluctant democrats. Lack of discipline is often acknowledged but usually justified. The general excuse being that indiscipline is a consequence of poverty and lack of resources. The claim about being reluctant democrats may appear strange! After all, India is globally lauded as a great functional democracy since independence and Indians themselves boast about being the world's largest democracy. Notwithstanding this praising of Indian democracy, often with a snide remark about Pakistan, Indians are most unwilling to accept democratic decisions.

At best they complain of the foolishness of the majority that does not agree with their wisdom. At worst they violate the majority decision, hope that the inefficiency of the system would ensure that they are not punished and find excuses and complain most vocally if punished for a wanton violation. The elite of the world, starting with the great Greek philosopher Plato, have always been critical of the

ability of the "masses" to make the correct decision and of their being "misled by despots". The Indian, conscious of his lack of both personal discipline and confidence in his personal ability strongly embraces this derision of democratic decisions.

For anyone who has lived in Delhi, universal lack of discipline is self evident. Ninety percent of middle class housing in Delhi is totally or partially illegal construction. A similar fraction of the drivers on road do not follow traffic rules. Everyone seems to think that the smallest inconvenience is sufficient excuse for breaking the rules. Thus, the house owner blithely challenges an inflated electricity bill even when the increase is smaller than the cost of an evening meal in his favorite restaurant and justifies his illegal efforts to reduce it. These are the examples of lack of discipline among the relatively well off in India, nailing the lie that indiscipline is a consequence of lack of resources.

As mentioned before, Indians claim that rules that do not prevent an injustice can and must be violated. He invokes the legacy of Gandhi and forgetting conveniently his call to bear the punishment peacefully and stoically which, if your cause were just, would induce a change in the hearts of those who made the rules. Our tendency to define rights expansively has been highlighted earlier. These "socialistic arguments" are often just a cover to justify indiscipline, to prevent punishment and to maintain the status quo. The Indian diseases of individual irresponsibility and consequent despise of democratic decisions is very deep rooted; as if the average Indian has been genetically altered as a consequence of living in an impoverished environment and lacks self confidence and vitality to take on responsibilities.

Most Indians believe that the prime responsibility of the current state of affairs rests with the corrupt politicians. They rarely accept that the people get the government that they deserve and as my earlier example of the Delhi houses shows, everyone is corrupt at his

own level. Lack of opportunity cannot be the basis for claiming the virtue of chastity. Sadly in the Indian context, it often is. The major problem of corruption in India is the unwillingness of the government servants to perform the jobs for which they are paid handsomely by Indian standards.

Most Indians also strongly believe in conspiracy theories. It is not only the politicians who accuse their opponents of "conspiring". Most Indians resort to this accusation whenever any decision big or small goes against them. One does not even pause to think whether anyone in a senior position can be a part of so many conspiracies when he only has 24 hours per day. These suspicions are a consequence reflect an inner sense of insecurity, lack of self confidence and above all else to acknowledge that in the battle of life the best are sometimes worsted.

This insecurity and unwillingness to face the vicissitudes of life result in immediate calls for "changing the system". The system is blamed for every unpleasant event and rules can and must be immediately changed to prevent a recurrence. Thus the Indian parliament has amended the Indian constitution about a hundred times so far. The US constitution in contrast was amended seventeen times in more than two centuries. Such rapid changes contribute to the general indiscipline.

The inefficiency of the system ensures that nothing gets done in a reasonable time frame. Despite the famed "iron framework of the civil service", India ranks very low in the global list of efficient administrations. Often it is worse than many which are disparagingly called "banana republics". This may be partly responsible for the respect shown to "strong" leaders. However, the Indian obeisance to leadership is also another instance of ducking personal responsibility. Often the subordinates openly admit to this charge! Once again the Gandhi's image of a moral leader has replaced God as the savior! A

devout individual praises God for his blessings, but does not lay misfortunes at his doorstep. So do Indians give credit to the leaders of their respective factions for every achievement and then blame "others" for the limitations and calamities. This has resulted in the internal emergency imposed by the "strong leader", when many crawled at the first order to bend.

Even in selecting the leader, Indians exhibit their disdain of democracy. They are sure that the voter is carried away by emotions. Thus the leadership continues in the family. They are quite sure that people will not give weight to the bald truth that the scion of the ruling family has accomplished nothing in his life, having been neither successful academically nor professionally and that he has not demonstrated any leadership in discharging his responsibilities, even as a head of a family! Continuing the leadership in the family is also an expression of the lack of individual confidence. By shifting the authority to the leader the subordinate does not have to convince his colleagues or have an open mind to the views of the others or arrive at a compromise or collective decision. Ultimately the Indians with their deep seated lack of self confidence fail to realize that over reliance on leadership is a sign of their own shortcoming.

Lack of self confidence leads to hope in acting for a collective goal rather than individual action. Thus formation of a separate state or implementation of a reservation policy or government laws in favor of the weak is perceived as an important solution for solving current problems. The failure of similar efforts in the past is never acknowledged. Various efforts towards an egalitarian society attempted since independence are never subjected to criticism. They are desirable and thus the failure to actually deliver is due to hidden conspiracies and treachery, not because the laws are impractical.

After the socialistic euphoria of the Government institutions serving the goals has ended, non government organizations (NGOs)

have inspired the courts to force cross subsidization. Thus beds in private hospitals and seats in private schools of Delhi are reserved because the institutions were given land at subsidized rates. It is quietly ignored that the paying users are picking the bill. Rather than accept individual responsibility, we add the right to education and to food to our already extensive list of unimplemented rights. Individuals may hope to assuage their guilty consciences, but such impractical plans based on pious hopes will fail. Unfortunately, individual efforts resulting in success are far less popular and in any case the average Indian suspects that something illegal or immoral is hidden. This route is disdained as elitist talk and will not help the majority.

By far the biggest problem caused by the indiscipline and inefficiency is the belief that you can do the other person's job better. It enables one to forget the irresponsibility and inefficiency in discharging one's own responsibilities. The best example of this are the courts in India! Every problem highlighted in the media becomes a court case the next day! In taking these on a priority, the courts are courting visibility in the media and perhaps satisfying their own consciences. As usual, the underlying reason for these forays into other's responsibilities is the guilt associated with the awareness of one's own inefficiency and failure to deliver on the primary responsibility. As with every other Indian the courts refuse to take the blame for their own failure. The judiciary can perhaps take some solace in the unsavory reality that after all the delays, when the final decision is delivered, it may not be implemented. While Indians profess to be law abiding they are anything but! There is the classic example of a 132 year old court case between the Shia and Sunni Muslims where the final verdict has not been implemented since 1981!

In a poetic vein "har Hindustani ki ek hai kwaish; age ek thanedar, peeche ek jamadaar" or the dearest wish of every Indian is for a security man who will control the rest so that his bidding can be done and a cleaner to pick up the debris he leaves behind. This utter

disrespect for discipline follows from a mortal fear that giving an inch would be disastrous. Thus the madness on the Delhi roads! This fear, itself a natural consequence of the awareness and non-admission of ones own incompetence. Further, attributing the same incompetence to others, we are reluctant to accept democratic decisions. In general a law is accepted only if it suits. Else the law is a calamity. Nothing in between exists.

Thus, as we conclude the analysis of the present, we realize that merely honesty is not sufficient. Corruption and nepotism are part of all human cultures. Establishing an efficient system is a key requirement for a better tomorrow. The current sad state of India is not caused by corruption of a few individuals nor will the emergence of honest leaders form the solution. It is important to select and implement a proper ideology in the context for a democratic polity. The basic problem is the unwillingness of Indians to accept a challenge and the much revered and much ignored Gandhi's position that you have to be the change you seek.

George Bernard Shaw in the famous preface to his play said "Nothing would please our sanctimonious British public more than to throw the whole guilt of Mrs. Warren's Profession (prostitution) on Mrs. Warren herself. Now the whole aim of my play is to throw that guilt on the British public itself". The goal of my summing up of the present state of "MY India" is exactly the same. The problems that were identified in the earlier vignettes are real. But contrary to the view espoused by most Indians, these will not be resolved by anyone except themselves.

Despite characterizing Indians as individually irresponsible, lacking in self confidence and reluctant democrats, the plan for the future of "MY India", to be outlined in the next part depends critically on changing this reality purely through argument and analysis. The pragmatism of operating within the existing rules of the society and a

commitment to democratic decision making are natural corollaries of my analysis of human knowledge as a guide to societal action. The balance between the role of individuals, electors, legislatures and judiciary as described in the next part are a direct application of this philosophical position to “MY India” drawing emotional sustenance from Swami Vivekananda's clarion call, arise, awake, stop not until your goal is achieved.

MY INDIA : THE FUTURE

The Preamble

Having defined "MY India" I have provided a personal account of its past and present. These may be challenged as biased, prejudiced, unfair, partial or subjective. The future I outline here falls in a new category altogether. There is no effort to extrapolate from the past and present to predict the future. Instead I outline a personal action plan that best encourages the emergence of "MY India" which approves the shares the modern humanistic effort to achieve "ideal" equality and fairness in the society but realizes the limitations discussed earlier.

The path outlined herein has to ensure that one does not fall into the fire of uncritical acceptance of everything modern from the frying pan of blindly following tradition. There is neither any reason to be dismissive about European Enlightenment because it did not in practice immediately secure equal rights either to women or to racial minorities. It is equally unnecessary to ignore complaints against contemporary multiculturalism and madness of political correctness as whining by the "dominant powerful groups". The effort to correct each and every minuscule inequality and unfairness in the society has

led to new problems in contemporary advanced societies. Justifying them as symbolic actions is merely an emotional blackmail to implement societal actions that do not improve the situation in any significant sense.

My plan for the future of "MY India" is exhaustive. It begins with a plan for placing before the electorate, suitable representatives. Thus what is being attempted is virtually a manifesto for a democratic polity. The subsequent essays include suggestions for some small changes in the democratic apparatus to ensure that most societal decisions are transparently and democratically decided. While most Indians claim to prefer democracy, one also hears rumblings of preference for a dictatorship. I hope that the scheme outlined herein will dissolve this.

The underlying philosophy of these proposals admits that there are no "universally correct rules", merely human conventions. Thus, one society's decision to ban public nudism is exactly as justified as another's demand for wearing of the burqa in public. What constitutes indecent exposure may be different inside the theatre and on the hoardings outside it. Similarly, a society can be committed to free speech and still ban "denial of the holocaust". Many claims of "hurting religious sentiments" can be dismissed and there is no justification for agitations which degenerate into violence. But proponents are entitled to a democratic means of persuading the society. Conflict between the freedom claimed by the hard secularist to free speech and demands by the devout for censoring free speech and many of the other societal norms have to be resolved through democratic rules.

Centralization of all such powers makes change difficult. Localization may result in large differences between the norms adopted by smaller entities leading to frictions and even breaking up of the country. The society must first have a transparent democratic process to decide whether such rules will be operational for by the country as

a whole, by a province or a locality. Then the relevant power can take a decision while those opposed to current rules can work towards a democratic change. In any case, both the decision regarding the level of the government to which power has been devolved as well as any consequent decision taken at any level, can be challenged democratically. In many western democracies for example, denial of the Holocaust can be a crime but calling for a repeal of this law should not be! The society has to permit open discussion of all challenges to existing rules, recognizing nothing either as "self evident" nor "divine". I am well aware that this will be neither to the taste of the liberal nor to the ideologue. The liberal groups passionately talk equality of individuals, but would not want a democratic choice since they fear the conservatives will prevail and restrict what they see as social progress. The devout would vocally support a current democratic choice since a majority are not secular in outlook. They however would not want an open discussion of the norms. They usually insist that their laws are divine and not merely a social convention, They may resort to violence when they realize that they are a minority.

Similarly, demands for the formation of separate provinces are extremely common in India. But groups passionately arguing for the right of self determination of a region rarely acknowledge the same right of a sub-region, thus exposing their reluctant acceptance of democratic processes. These once again would not be happy with the methods for resolution of societal conflicts outlined here. But for a comprehensive plan, as proposed herein, this challenge has to be accepted. Intellectual acceptance by a vast majority is the hope driving its articulation.

The usual grumbling about the "ignorance or prejudice of the electorate" often masks a fear of one's own preferences being rejected by the majority. So the reluctant democrat prefers to use other paths to achieve his goal. Discord between, local and central democratic authorities, judiciary and the public are part of every democratic society

that is known. It is only to be expected that people, committed to a particular position would employ whatever organ is most receptive to implement their view point. But if one is a democrat one has to first make a covenant to accept the majority decision and change it from within. In the current context, one hope for the formation of a core group of representatives to attract the majority towards this path. Later pieces outline measures for balancing the three organs of a democracy; namely the elected representatives, the judiciary and the society at large.

The proposals for minor modification of the democratic apparatus are followed by discussion of social and economic policies and programs. In all cases, norms and rules of the society are expected to be pragmatic and practical nor idealistic or ideological. Thus, neither market based mechanisms nor a socialistic commitment to "class" or "caste" (since many in India claim that in the Indian context caste is class) are uniformly accepted. A strong social net is to be implemented, but this is not to be left either to market mechanisms or individual philanthropy. At the same time there are no "universally appropriate entitlements" in the social safety net. Regretfully, the quality of the safety net will be determined not by the desirability or moral imperatives but by affordability.

In deciding if the society can afford a social good, wealth available for redistribution has to be properly assessed. All too often in India, simple minded idealists assume that personal wealth or ostentatious expenditure of rich individuals is really available for redistribution. The market analysts make the same mistake when they glibly announce that the stock market has fallen by a few hundred points and thus wiped out billions from the wealth of investors. Both call upon the government to concede more of their ideological demands. In both cases there is only exchange; of goods and services in the former case and of shares in the latter. The wasteful expenditure and loss of wealth are both notional. However, there is a problem with the share

market activity becoming legally sanctioned gambling and some measures of control are discussed.

To generate the funds required for any effective social safety net, strong economic growth is necessary. Ultimately one needs a society where a majority of the people have the capabilities to offer goods and services other than food! Over emphasizing the handicaps and a sentimental definition of "fundamental rights" is simply never going to work. There is no action of any individual, society or government that is not going to harm anyone. Gandhi offered a religious answer. "Recall the face of the poorest and weakest man you have seen, and ask yourself if this step you contemplate is going to be any use to him". Regretfully, when we do this analysis and desist from some contemplated action, many people marginally better than this poorest man cited as an example may be worse off leaving you with a dilemma! So one has to take pragmatic decisions regarding the burning issues of land, mineral resources, rights of "the forest dweller's" etc. Several specific approaches are suggested. Some analysis of India in the context of the neighboring countries, the environment, etc. are also presented rounding off this manifesto.

The manifesto is a call to be pragmatic and practical. Throwing the blame on exploitation by the Muslim invaders a thousand years ago, the colonial masters a couple of hundred years ago, the current rich capitalists, their lackeys or the forward castes appeals to emotions of different sections. Such approaches have not worked in the sixty odd years since independence. Above all else the Indian fixation with leadership has to be abandoned. India does not need elected strong men to protect the people from either the rich capitalist or the inhuman forward caste leader. In reality complex problems have no logical answers and neither does the leader. Different individuals come to different conclusions. The Indian political parties do not have a system to resolve these differences. Thus, the leader's decision is accepted. Not because of its inherent wisdom, but because the only point of

agreement is to accept the leader's decision without question. The cacophony of the sycophants is only an unwillingness to shoulder the responsibility. Thus the prevalence of dynastic leaderships. Similarly, support for one's own caste or community hides a bitter truth. Being conscious of one's own shortcomings, the same dishonesty is attributed to everyone else. Since one is also pessimistic of universal improvement, one takes pride in "one of us" benefiting, if only by corruption.

The present manifesto is both a call for collective action and a blueprint for practically implementing this. Indians need to take the responsibility for improving the local societal environment through personal action. Acting within the constraints of the existing system is most important. That alone provides means which as Gandhi insisted must match the ends one has in mind. Confidence in the ability to collectively chart a completely new approach is the foundation of this effort.

On Being The Right Representative

A direct democracy with every individual directly participating in democratic decision making on each issue is theoretically attractive. Athens, generally accepted as the oldest democracy was one such. The internet, permitting almost free communications, has enthused many to hope for a replacement of the current representative democracies with an electronic direct democracy. But a little thought will convince one that such a procedure will often lead to rapid fluctuations and contradictions in policy. While the distant future cannot be predicted, for a complex and large country like India, representative democracy is the only one currently practical.

In most established democracies, elected representatives make most decisions, but some forms of direct democratic actions are also available. For example, referendums to approve or reject proposals, ballot initiatives to propose changes and recall of elected representatives are available in some countries. None of these are available currently to Indians. Some proposals for including these will be made later. The current approach advocates reform and not a revolution. Thus,

there is a requirement to propose a framework for proposing a set of suitable candidates who can be elected as representatives under the current rules.

Thus, the key requirement in the India context is to organize a genuinely democratic political party. Sadly, existing political parties in India do not implement strong internal democracy. Most are dictatorial where the leader brooks no challenge. Even the Mahatma succumbed to this disease. He complained bitterly, "Subhash's victory is my defeat" when Subhash Chandra Bose contested and became the president of the Congress in 1939 against his wishes. The party did not rest till Bose, "the usurper" was forced to resign. This essential dictatorial nature of the congress had its impact on the other parties formed after independence, which were mostly formed by disgruntled congress leaders. Under Indira Gandhi, this became a specified dynastic rule very much like Napoleon founding a new lineage of emperors after the French revolution,. In contemporary India, this dynastic succession of leadership is being copied by many other political parties.

To create a proper alternative, the proposed organization has to be fundamentally structured in a different mold to avoid it becoming a mirror image of existing parties. The first step is to empower the local members of the party to democratically elect the candidate to contest the election rather than impose the selection from above through a selection committee. In contrast to India, most established democracies implement this in one way or another. The much publicized primaries in the US presidential race are just one example. It is best to demand that this selection has to be by a two third majority of the members of the locality. A two third majority has one great advantage over a simple majority. A simple majority of those who initially supported, being one third of the original have to change their views before an alternative can emerge. Thus the decisions will not be challenged when a small fraction change their mind. If the individual members cannot even identify a candidate with the support of two thirds of

the members, the chances of their being able to solve the difficult national problems are minimal.

Thus the members who join this endeavor, being convinced of the social and economic policies outlined in the next few essays would select the candidates for contesting the local bodies, the state legislatures and the parliament. The decentralization of democratic decisions ensures that the organization cannot participate in coalition politics. Since the decision to contest an election from a given constituency lies with the individual members, a pre-poll alliance, sharing seats with other parties, cannot be made. It is quite wrong to claim, as many do, that fractured mandate with no parties or pre-poll alliances having a clear majority justifies post poll alliances. This is a clear lack of principles and commitment to ones own programs.

It is the responsibility of the general population to ensure the formation of a viable government. Dilution of ones own policies is not a proper response to their failure. Certainly a party in opposition may support any measure of the ruling party in case it agrees with the core approach but nothing beyond is promised to the public by participating in elections. Just as there are responsibilities for the representatives and the judiciary, there are responsibilities for the electorate and electing a stable government is the first.

The cost of elections is often cited as a reason against repeated elections and a justification for alliances. To be sure financial aspects should be taken into consideration. But, this cannot be at the cost of the political ideology. For the proposed entity the ban on both pre and post election alliances will stand. The cost of democracy in India could be significantly lowered by ensuring that elections to the local, provincial and central legislatures are all conducted simultaneously. This is mostly rejected as encroachment of provincial autonomy. Actually it is a fear of loosing once own ability to influence the elections through immoral and possible illegal means and fear of the others doing the

same. Eventually some changes to the constitution in this line would be useful. However this is not a priority for the proposed democratic party.

Contemporary India cynically dismisses all possibility of avoiding the influence of money as naïve. This fails to recognize the technological progress that has reduced cost of communication to nothing. Using internet, electronic messaging processes and the free press, the organization of the elections as well as propagation of ideas does not require funds. The operation of a party without the conventional paraphernalia of election meetings, advertisements, processions and banners is certainly possible. The voter has to recognize the advantage of a party that spends less and does not misuse government funds. The basic requirement as usual is to stop looking down on the common voter as a misguided fool. The contemporary voter is biased and parochial because parties in the contemporary scene lack the courage to be different. Historian S Gopal, speaking of Gandhi and Nehru commented that there is often a dilemma for the leader; whether to retain his convictions and lose his followers or to lose his convictions to retain them. A joke springs to mind. A pastor invited his parishioners for a special prayer for rain, and then asked the assembly "Where are your umbrellas?" So those proposing a change must believe in what is being proposed. Why blame others when those proposing to lead have no faith? The present practical suggestions on how to organize a free democratic party explicitly accepts this challenge. Maybe this will lead to a revolutionary change in Indian polity much as the one-anna membership of the congress advocated by the mahatma during the freedom struggle changed the congress.

Proposing a set of candidates with a coherent political ideology is only the first step. Some other constraints have to be voluntarily accepted by the proposed party. Currently, the prime minister (and the chief minister in the state) are elected by the respective parties but are expected to be free to choose their cabinet. This is a concentration of

power that has to be abandoned. Both the size of the cabinet and the individual members assigned to various departments must be selected by the elected representatives themselves democratically. This does not violate the constitution. The current practice in India has been copied from the British parliament and the English precedence is useless in Indian conditions. The respect shown to tradition and precedence by the English is unique. The best proof of this is their ability to get along despite the absence of a written codified constitution. The proposed party should define through its representatives both the size and composition of the ministry and not leave it to be decided behind closed doors by a leader.

Similarly, under the Indian constitution, the president is elected but the governors of the various provinces are not. This once again reflects the British inheritance. The parties in power at the center have in general tried to employ the governors to interfere in the provincial governments. The nominee of the proposed political party, for contesting the presidential election should once again be selected by the elected members of the legislatures and the parliament as usual by a two third majority. Nothing in the current constitution prohibits the appointment of governors who have demonstrated that they command the respect of two thirds of the elected representatives in the respective assemblies. Once again we encounter a minor changes to the existing constitution that could eventually be incorporated.

While the above outlines the process for proposing eligible candidates, the qualifications required for them have to be identified. Many Indians admire the preponderance of youth among the leaders of other countries and disparage the aged political leaders of India. However when the young become political leaders, politics becomes a life long profession. For a stable and useful democratic polity, one has to accept a limited role for the elected representatives. The representatives can reflect the desires of the population at large, but the implementation is perforce left to the professional expertise of permanent

employees. Thus technical competence of an elected representative is not very useful. Even in the scientific disciplines it is well recognized that the best scientist is most often not the best scientific administrator. The British TV satire "Yes Minister" exposes the difficulties the politicians face in getting the government machinery to deliver, but professional politicians are more a problem than a solution. The problems of a society are complex and there are no miraculous solutions. Every solution will have undesirable consequences, some of which are often unpredictable. Leadership is given very little weight in the present analysis. The "leader" may through his personality influence the population and carry the society with him to win elections, but the analysis here expects that such leaders seldom deliver on their promises and often cause misery. The number of charismatic leaders who led the society to ruin is quite large! The path outlined here is different, namely a collective leadership with the humility to propose modest changes and cautiously implement them.

Thus, in proposing proper representative, neither debating nor communicating skills should be considered very important. However, a past record of having accomplished something is very important. One can consider the successful householder who had brought up a family successfully through his professional earning. He would be a good choice as a representative. Such a person must have been disciplined enough to have acquired an education, hard working enough to have been professionally active and knows something about human relationships. Bringing up the children to be responsible adults and carrying the family along with him in complex situations are useful traits. An alternate would be an individual who was committed to social service and has actually demonstrated his ability to work directly on a small scale. Thus we should not care too much for the religious leader nor for his devout disciple. They like the charismatic leaders from other domains may well sway the people with their words, but their absence from our list of representatives will not be missed! One may wonder if this demand to demonstrate a credible performance in

the battle of life may be very restrictive. A person may have perhaps failed despite his own capabilities. After all, the battle of life is one in which the best are sometimes worsted. But in denying someone our support for being our representative, we are not restricting his fundamental rights. This is merely a practical resolution of our difficult decision.

This decision to select as possible representative someone who demonstrated an ability to take care of his own life ensures that the individuals will not be young. In general, they would be approaching their age of retirement. This has two advantages. The candidate is less likely to worry about what he should do in case of failure to be selected or elected. But, the tendency to hold political offices till death or disability is a major factor in dynastic succession, as is the lack of necessity to demonstrate their own competence in their personal life. An individual too undisciplined to acquire an education, too indifferent to taking responsibility and too dependent on family resources to carry on his life is simply not a person to be entrusted with political power. To this one adds a strict limitation of the total period over which one may serve in any elected political office. If, for example, this period is set as about ten years, the dynastic inheritance problem is automatically resolved. Given the preference for mature adults as representatives, the children will not be in that age to be selected at the end of this short political career.

Another reason for the personality cult, dynasties and leaderships is not subjecting the past record of the candidates to the simple test of democracy. In contemporary Indian political practice, the group or individual in whose favor, an issue has been decided by the leadership, praise the "statesmanship or leadership qualities" leading to the correct decision. Those adversely affected by the decision either bemoan the mistake, hide their disappointment or in some cases decide to part company. The program outlined for the currently proposed organization envisages that all decisions are to be arrived at

democratically. In this situation, the third option, leaving the political party is untenable. Parting of company has to be irrevocable since the defection exposes an unwillingness to accept the democratic majority decision. Thus anyone having openly rejected and challenged a democratic decision can never be readmitted into the fold. Those committed to this "free democratic party" must be prepared to accept that there are no second chances. A person who disobeys a democratic decision cannot be a member at any time in the future. This eliminates the most annoying feature of contemporary Indian democracy, namely defection and the accusations and suspicions that defectors have been "purchased". Sulking and being qualitatively unhelpful are to be accepted and thus there cannot be "expulsions" either. The causes for permanent rupture must be very clear. Actually, in a transparently democratic setup, noncooperation would also be visible and counter productive. After all chances of the current "wrong decision" being reversed depends on convincing the majority and noncooperation would make this difficult.

As with most things in a democracy, the responsibility must ultimately be borne by the electorate, who it is expected will accept the challenge offered by such a genuinely democratic party with a viable economic and social policy and begin the journey to create The program outlined for the currently proposed organization glorious future for "My India"

Shouldering Responsibilities

An anecdote attributed to the American president Theodore Roosevelt is very illuminating. When he expressed his desire to enter politics in about 1880 an elder member of his family objected, saying that politics was not suitable for decent people. Roosevelt quipped that it would be his duty to ensure that politics was suitable for decent folks. The famous economist, Amartya Sen, has called the Indians argumentative. But Indians do not have an argument as to whether politicians are corrupt and incompetent. They merely assert that the politicians whom they oppose are "worse" than whom they support. One can only hope that the transparent mechanism outlined in the previous essay on the formation and operation of a new political party would convince most that it is possible to have a competent and honest alternative and that politics will henceforth be for decent folks.

Earlier, nondemocratic challenges to "MY India" were discussed. Democratic decision making is paramount within the proposed democratic party. Not very surprisingly, one envisages an equivalent primacy for democratic resolution of all issues. Given the extremely

poor governance in contemporary India, frustration is quite understandable. But that is a personal and emotional response. Holding the system to ransom cannot be accepted. There can be no negotiations with those perversely committed to the achievement of power through the barrel of a gun, or those who try to hold the government to ransom through agitations nor capitulation to individuals employing a fast as the method of coercion.

Within a democratic society, the individual voter, their representative and the judiciary have individual responsibilities. One problem with contemporary India highlighted earlier is the tendency of one to perform the other's job and blame the other two rather than accept personal responsibility for the inability to perform the primary responsibilities. This is a sign of both incompetence and insecurity. The failures are masked by demands for providing relief in individual cases rather than changing the system to make it more responsive.

Partly, such *ad hoc* responses resemble the attitude of the medieval ruler distributing largesse. Politicians (representatives) are always ready to announce ex-gratia payments. They like the ensuing publicity. No one questions the inherent inequality in such *ad hoc* distribution of public funds. Only those lucky enough to get publicity or clever enough to arrange for it get the benefit! Such a distribution is acceptable for personal charity, but not for government resources which must be available uniformly to all recipients. The politicians do not try to arrange personal charity. They take the easy route of announcing a distribution of government funds.

The emphasis on personal relief is also a reflection of the insecurity. There is almost no confidence that the system is working or even that it can be made to work. Once again the cost of these actions on an already inefficient system in terms of time, money and resources are ignored. The politician can make an announcement very easily, but the government has to follow all required procedures. In most cases

the hidden cost of the employee time required to follow these procedures is far higher. The reports of how difficult it is for the beneficiary to actually collect on the promises are disturbing, but these cases cannot bypass the government inefficiency and corruption.

Further, one sees the sad spectacle of people demanding relief and even going on the rampage while they are clearly responsible for their own plight. The response of people moved down by a moving train on the railway track or trying to steal power from a high tension transmission are good examples. Not only do the victims lack discipline, it is considered "not proper" for others to point this out!

Individual Indians have created an industry of approaching the courts for redressal of all grievances, minor or major. The courts have followed suit in taking "suo moto" notice of the newspaper headlines. They have begun to see themselves charging on a white steed to protect the defenseless victims of corrupt political leaders. Perhaps, to some extent, this is the response to the demand for a "committed judiciary" during the heydays of socialistic policies. In that era, judges who question the capitalist ideas of fundamental rights were to be encouraged! The judicial activism is also a result of the intellectual's disgust of political corruption. The courts arbitrarily give importance to some cases, exactly like the politicians making ex-gratia payments, ignore the consequences on other issues and act as if everyone else is either foolish or incompetent. The contempt that the judicial authorities express openly for the administrators and politicians is simply hilarious when we consider that the biggest failure in India is the judiciary. If justice delayed is justice denied, then the legendary delays in the Indian courts are a clear indictment of those who deliver it.

While, the judiciary hides its inability to reduce delays through activist intervention in the administration, the representatives hide their incompetence in resolving issues by hiding behind the judiciary. The representatives become selectively conscious of an issue being sub-

judice and then can quietly avoid it! The greatest example is the Ram Janmabhoomi dispute. Here is an issue that can only be resolved by compromise. The Hindus and the Muslims were disputing about the place even as the concepts of civil law, property rights and the modern courts were being established a hundred and fifty years ago. For forty years the courts permitted the case to remain unresolved while the idols installed in 1949 remained behind locked gates and prayers offered daily by a priest. Then a court decision unlocking the gates directly led to the demolition and consequent mayhem across India. Twenty years later, the final court order has not emerged, and there is no guarantee of its acceptance or implementation! If the few hundred parliamentarians cannot come out with a unanimous compromise, how can they implement a decision that would not please one group or the other? Accepting this challenge and devising an acceptable compromise will be an acid test of the success of the proposed democratic polity.

While evading their own proper responsibilities, the judiciary and the representatives take a paternalistic and condescending view of the public and refuse to concede power to the public. There are no rules for direct referendums on any issue in the Indian constitution. So regional and sub-regional aspirations, provincial autonomy, recall of representatives and ultimately the right to secede from the union are all made intractable. To be sure, many of these are myths. Formation of new states will not materially alter the socioeconomic conditions. With a few exceptions in Jammu and Kashmir and the North Eastern states, the right of Indians to relocate to another state cannot be legally challenged. So there is no meaning to the claim that "outsiders" are exploiting the locals. The outsiders can still relocate to the new province and after a few years will become a local. So these demands for "autonomy" are misguided at best. But, as long as belief in "colonial exploitation" as the cause of India's backwardness is unchallenged "truth", regional disparities are easily ascribed to exploitation by "outsiders". However, myths become real problems for a society when a

large number believe in them. To devise mechanisms for challenging and controlling the myths is a major challenge for the proposed democratic polity. Thus the absence of referendums in the present Indian constitution has to change.

By not accepting the challenge of openly confronting the myths and convincing the participants of the democracy, the current policy permits grievances to fester. This has a lot in common with legal delays. Even more worrying, there is no actual assessment of the support in the population for the various demands, be they the formation of a separate state, recall of representatives or even the occasional demands for independence. Proper mechanisms of referendum are required for countering the claims of the self elected "representatives" of the affected people and the support the ideas actually have. Paternalistic worries about the capabilities of the people to take these decisions reveal a reluctance to be a democrat! In a similar line, the powers for deciding on social norms have to be provided to local democratic institutions and not to self appointed guardians and planners. This would include local norms of what is accepted as "decent" as well as what is accepted as the proper balance between "environment and development". First one democratic decision selects the entity which is empowered (national, provincial or local government) which takes the actual decisions on a case by case basis.

In line with the above discussion, the representatives of the proposed polity must limit *ad hoc*, impromptu, ex-gratia, empathic, emergency contributions to personal and group charity and disdain to load the government machinery with them. Hopefully, the representatives selected by the new approach may have the moral confidence to accept their responsibility, stand-up to the judiciary and enforcing changes so that civil and criminal acts are properly distinguished and delays reduced. Further, for "dialogue" outside the democratic framework will not be entertained irrespective of whether the gun, the bandh or the fast are the tools being employed. Ultimately, people get the

government they deserve. Sometimes there is sympathetic murmuring about a strong and able ruler who can take hard decisions. In reality hard decisions such as the above can only be taken in a collective democratic way. There are just too many examples of strong leaders, leftist, rightist, fascist and religious who have caused horrendous damage to their own societies and to the world at large.

The next few vignettes will highlight a coherent economic and social programs which, in conjunction with the internal democracy are expected to be democratically accepted by the electorate. It is likely that some of these economic and political policies may not be acceptable to some. The democratic framework developed so far can be retained even if these policies are altered. For example, it is possible to visualize an alternate calling for nationalization of all private property, reservation for a specific group or even a religious personal law. The key strength of the internal democracy is its ability to either slowly dissolve such hard agenda or sideline the proponents in the democratic marketplace. Only those who commit to the democratic process for implementation of their social and economic goals and are optimistic about resolving all problems through these means can make a meaningful contribution to the future of "MY India".

Economic Policies 1

Clearing Socialist Deadwood

The first item of any realistic economic agenda for “MY India” has to be clearing the socialist deadwood accumulated since independence. The approach as outlined here seeks to limit government action to the maintenance of a rule based society and a social safety net. Almost everyone admits that the post independence program to enshrine the public sector on the commanding heights of the economy has failed. In many cases, the entities established directly or created through nationalization have been partially privatized to generate funds for the budget. Some entities are still totally owned by the government usually because no one would offer to buy their shares! Some others are government departments. Only in a handful of cases have the units been completely privatized.

Even units that have been partially privatized, have lost the monopoly of operation that was the hallmark of the earlier socialist period. At the same time, management has been retained in government hands, ensuring that there is no improvement of efficiency. Thus what we have is the worst of both worlds. Continuing to support the

partially public undertakings or selling of minority shares without relinquishing control are the natural actions of closet socialists. As mentioned many times before, politicians in India have not disowned their socialist mindset. The contrast with, for example the contemporary labor party in the United Kingdom which continues to support a large social role for the government, but has given up the earlier approach of government ownership is very illustrative. Continued financial support to partially denationalized entities, usually for emotional reasons is equivalent to direct transfer of public resources to the private owners. This absurdity is not being recognized and must be stopped.

The proposed democratic entity admits unreservedly that no government organization can be competitive. Thus, if government entities exist, they must serve a unique social purpose and thus be monopolies. In a competitive environment, failure is inevitable. The government must decline to compete. Air India, All India Radio (AIR) and Doordarshan (DD) are very simple examples of entities who have completely lost any justification for their existence. In the competitive environment, they fail miserably. A number of public enterprises and departments pretend to perform “reasonably” in the competitive environment. When analyzed case by case, one invariably finds fudged financial statements, hidden government subsidies or other mechanisms to prop up these entities. A uniform policy to completely eliminate such institutions has to be taken up.

Exceptions if any have to be justified by societal necessity. Such entities would be reoriented to provide the extended social safety net that is to be built. For example, the Food Corporation of India could remain as an integral part of an effort for procurement, storage and distribution of food for the foreseeable future. Similarly Indian Railways and other public transport services could remain. But such entities will not have to compete with private commercial units operating for profit. Consequently, those entities that are retained will not be required to generate profits and may be subsidized for social good.

The key issue is to identify the social service which cannot be provided by the private sector. At the same time there cannot be minority private ownership in such entities. The silly notion of leveraging the efficiency of private sector by indirect subsidies or by some type of voucher programs where the government provides the money to individuals as part of the safety net to buy from the private sector is not to be encouraged.

Nationalization in the financial sector has resulted in many absurdities. At one point, government owned banks, insurance companies, etc. were the largest shareholders in most large private companies. Thus, unusual rules protecting the promoters and management from takeovers were created. In a different context, nationalized banks were forced to conduct "loan melas" where small loans could be provided without collateral as a socialistic measure to support the party in power. With the opening of the economy, the same banks have been indiscriminate lenders to the private sector, perhaps under political pressure in aid of crony capitalism and have accumulated extensive non-performing assets. Large manpower, protected by strong unions, which cannot be forced to work by the ineffective managers is common to all public enterprises. These perennial problems of public sector become merely small additions to the financial skullduggery in the case of banks. The lack of a strong, independent management of the banks has to be corrected immediately.

In the current context, there would have to be a transfer of ownership between selected state owned banks, for example the State Bank of India and its subsidiaries and the partially privatized "nationalized banks". The former will then remain totally safe government entities offering a lower interest rate with absolute safety while the latter become totally privatized banks competing with other private banks and offering higher returns but not absolute safety. This would also resolve the dilemma of subsidizing partly privatized entities mentioned earlier. The government owned entities, freed from the demand

to be competitive can be better supervised to ensure that they take minimal risks and concentrate on socially relevant lending.

As a socialistic measure, life insurance was nationalized in 1956 and general insurance in 1972. Private companies have been allowed to return as part of liberalization, though foreign investment is resisted by the socialistic bias of the political parties. The key problems though are corruption, socialistic bias and delays in the courts. Every insurance claim is seen as a fight between the weak individual and the large company keen to maximize its profits. There is a general tendency to condone dishonesty in claims. It is not very uncommon to find insurance agents who promise to return the premium of vehicle insurance in the form of claims! Those who repeatedly claim insurance benefits are not charged more premium as “risky insurers”. They merely lose the fixed “no claim bonus”: Thus one ends with a situation where the honest customers end up subsidizing the dishonest!

The most important issue is security. In general, the free market principle says "no risk; no return". However, for those with limited resources, no risk is acceptable. For a well endowed individual a failure could be a setback; for a poorly endowed individual it could be catastrophic. In the case of endowment insurance, security has to be available over a long term. To expect absolute security and that too over a long term from private sector players is absurd. Thus, in contrast to the manufacturing sector one sees an immediate need for insurance operators backed by the sovereign guarantee of the government. Short term insurance can be underwritten by the private players, with the government owned firms leaving the field. Life Insurance Corporation of India, (LIC) backed by the government must remain the sole source for long term endowment policies. Economist's claim that term insurance is more efficient solution. This may well be true, but many poor people cannot save enough to afford unclaimed insurance premiums. Thus, as one comes to grips with the nitty-gritty of dismantling the socialist dead wood, one can easily perceive a differ-

ence between the current non-ideological approach and the standard free market policies.

Another uniquely Indian problem is the complex and contentious issue of land. In the context of the clearing of socialist deadwood, land becomes an issue because of the possibility that government owned units are being purchased by private parties merely to acquire ownership of land. This has to be prevented. The simplest approach is to revert the land ownership to the government if the new private owners do not continue the industry that has been denationalized. It has to be remembered that most of this land was acquired by the government for "public good".

Restricting the ownership of land acquired for industrial activity by private parties to tenancy rights may be a good policy in other situations also. The government should also not approve changes in land usage whose ownership has changed in the recent past. This will ensure that people with political connections do not buy land, use their connections for getting the necessary permits and then make profits. As mentioned in a previous essay, transparent direct referendum based policies have to be brought in to decide whether the rights for changing land use remain with the national, provincial or local authorities.

"Eminent domain" or the right of the government to acquire land exists in all democratic societies, but compensation equal to commercial cost is mandated. Unfortunately, as a socialistic measure against the owners of large tracts of agricultural land, democratic India introduced land ceiling rules and reduced compensation to nominal values. In other cases, the government mandates payment of compensation at the local rates notified by the government from time to time. There is a resistance to increase these rates because the registration costs of all properties would increase. Any land acquisition is judicially challenged from various angles; project design, tribal rights and environmental concerns. As usual, this judicial process is very slow. By the time these

hurdles are overcome and the land is used by the new owner, the property rates have increased. As was said in an earlier discussion, land conversion is being politically controlled to ensure an escalation of prices. The old owners are never satisfied with the compensation that has been paid.

Quite apart from this genuine resentment, the recent public-private-partnership model is completely unethical. In most cases, the private party develops part of the land for private use and makes enormous profits. A grand example is the recently privatized Delhi Airport. The company actually makes losses on the airport despite claims of the private sector being efficient! But the owners made a bundle on real estate development on nearby land transferred to it as a sweetener of the deal! When private land is acquired by the government and ultimately resold by the developer at huge price escalation, the original owners are bound to resent this exploitation of their land for private gain! This approach will have to be abandoned in its entirety.

It bears repetition to point out that the present approach proposes the creation of a proper universal safety net, but this is incompatible with emotional support for an imaginary "ancient pastoral paradise". While tenancy rules have been invoked as a useful approach in the context of land acquisition and land usage, they are a major cause of enormous legal delays. An overarching legislation limiting the protection under tenancy rules to people with low wealth and income is an absolute immediate necessity. Tenancy rights have a wide support among the politicians, public at large and even the judiciary. Thus, perhaps it is unrealistic to expect the total repeal of tenancy laws to be democratically acceptable immediately. But, it is necessary to ensure that contracts in particular rent contracts can be enforced. This single measure would reduce the existing backlog of judicial cases substantially. In many situations, to plan a future for "MY India", clearing the cobwebs of the socialist mindset is even more important than selling public sector undertakings. Support of an economically weak indi-

vidual is the responsibility of a social safety net. Advocating tenancy rights in one circumstance while simultaneously de-legitimizing tenancy rights in other is another example of the empirical mix and match approach advocated here.

The clearing of socialist deadwood advocated here has to consider the social burden of the existing employees of public sector undertakings. It is unrealistic to expect that employees long accustomed to working in the “government mode” can be successful if thrown into the competitive environment. It is equally foolhardy to expect that the employees would suffer peacefully the loss of direct and indirect financial benefits. Any revolutionary change would be resisted and indirectly or intentionally wrecked. As with the proposals regarding the selection of representatives, the changes must be coherent but gradual.

A conservative political organization in the context of advanced western societies expects not only the exit of government from competitive economic activity, but a consequent reduction of the total size of the government. Nothing can be farther from the current proposal. A comprehensive social safety net has to be devised and put in place and there will be a large need for manpower to provide these services. Thus relocation of the manpower from the public sector to the government, without significantly lowering their current emoluments is the correct approach.

This is a new policy for the government to withdraw from the policy of commanding the heights of the economy, clear the socialist deadwood and seriously limits itself to the provision of a universal safety net. Privatizing public sector undertakings is neither a budgetary exercise for reducing the deficit nor an advocacy of “laissez faire” economics for a small government. Privatizing of industries is a challenge to the private sector to demonstrate the claimed efficiencies not a short cut to acquire free land and make guaranteed profits. The em-

ployees will have their job security. They will either be relocated to other government work or even loaned to work in the private sector. This may not contribute to short term budget deficits, but will serve the nation in the long run. The changes to general tenancy rights and private-public-partnerships and land usage will restrict the "crony capitalism" which has replaced the earlier "license permit quota raj".

Economic Policies 2

No Subsidized Luxuries

The erstwhile colonial administrators, like all rulers since the creation of kingdoms and empires used a lavish lifestyle as a statement of power. As was discussed earlier, their lifestyle probably impoverished the country while the modern knowledge they brought initiated “MY India”. The brown sahibs followed in the wake of their white superiors. Gandhi's simplicity had a profound influence on the Indian leaders and the public and in the early years of independence, there was a palpable sense of unease with conspicuous extravagance.

But even then, independent India retained the low cost hand spun *khadi* cloth only for "special occasions". Indians were not committed to an egalitarian dress code in contrast to the neighbors to the north. There, an egalitarian life style was forced on everyone except the uppermost dictatorship after the revolution. Anyhow, the unease dissipated with time and the opening of the economy has erased the last vestiges of such feelings. This is perfectly understandable in a capitalist, consumerist society. However, many seem to ignore the distinction between spending ones own money and the taxpayers money.

Still, the direct ostentatious expenditure is a small part government expenditure. Such expenditure is visible and the open press in India ensures that it is highlighted. However, there are lots of hidden subsidies that are neither recognized nor discussed.

A few examples would illustrate this. Consider the money spent by the government for the so called encouragement of sports. The direct expenditures could range from sponsoring of athletes for participation in international meets to awards announced by the politicians to the winners. The indirect expenditures are investments in infrastructure and organization of international events like the commonwealth games. In the earlier socialist era, these approaches were copied from the socialist countries as necessary to inculcate a pride in the nation state. Sadly, the accomplishments have been miserable but that is a different story..

For historical reasons, cricket is the only sports activity that actually generates any kind of revenue. Thus, there are loud demands that other sports be subsidized either by the cash rich controllers of cricket or the government. As usual, since nobody is successful anyway, it is easy to enter into a sport not common in India and earn oneself a trip abroad. The infrastructure created rapidly becomes useless since there is no budgetary provision for maintenance and eventual replacement. It is more attractive to demand money for newer facilities. It offers more opportunity for corruption. But more importantly, it offers better publicity both for the politicians and the administrators. It is a mute question whether such expenditure is justified when the vast majority of school students not to speak of the general public have access to any sort of facilities for playing games or physical exercise.

But in all this critical examination the key question is still being forgotten! The largest portion of the taxpayers money is in reality spent on the employees. The salaries are only one portion. There are

medical benefits, subsidized housing, pensions and above all, more employees required to provide these perks! The travel bill of a participant in a sports event, even if the achievement is ignored, is at least reflected in a budget. But the administrative cost of approving the bill and the perks of these employees are not even counted! This is the great Indian system of separating all expenditure into plan (the travel bill) and non-plan (the administration). Periodically, whenever there is a financial crunch, there is the demand to cut non-plan expenditure. Sadly, construction of a new facility is plan expenditure while maintenance is non-plan. Finally the cut in non-plan expenditure results in cutting the maintenance funds as salaries can't be cut!

The above description of "sports" closely mirrors the situation in many other areas like scientific research, higher education and culture. On the whole, there is very little to show as actual achievement. The claims regarding accomplishments are quite often lies. Nowhere is the old adage that "there are lies, damned lies and statistics" more applicable. For example, the hybrid rice varieties that increased yields in India were actually developed at the International Rice Research Institute, Manila . No one mentions this and Indian scientists, individually and collectively claim credit for the "revolutionary improvement in food production". Very recently, ISRO has been credited with having "discovered" water on the moon. The discovery is actually fifty years old. The only connection of ISRO to the recent work is that NASA paid ISRO to launch the instrument package. The satellite was designed, built and operated by their scientists who duly claimed credit and published the research. But the shallow claims with which Indian's hide their inferiority are beside the point. This is not a call to close all inefficiency of government support. Merely a need to be honest, both in the claims and in calculating the real costs so that a democratic society can take a call on how much of it is justified.

Aside from this, the quality of perks are continuously upgraded. Consider medical benefits. To begin with, the government servants

shared the services of the government hospitals. Then special privileges like private rooms and private appointment facilities were created specifically for the government employees and their dependents. While medicines may not be available for the general public, independent stores were created to procure them for government servants. A special Central Government Health Scheme (CGHS) was created.

But the government hospitals are “inefficient”. So permission was given to avail services in private hospitals at rates specified by the government. Eventually a cashless treatment option has been provided to most government servants and pensioners. So they need not even pretend to go to government facilities. There is no oversight by a government department to ensure that the claims are reasonable. Such oversight is never effective, but the bureaucracy could at least limit the flood! Essentially there is unlimited medical insurance with the insurer not even having a right to verify claims! In other departments like the railways and defense, special hospitals were created. One does not know when these employees will also get the privilege of using private hospital services. The net result is that no one quite knows what the cost of providing the medical services to the government employees actually is. Logically the salaries paid to CGHS employees is part of this, but then the money is paid out in so many diverse budgets that there no simple way to even know!

Military canteens are a similar case. There is obviously some justification, particularly to provide groceries and other necessities to troops are located in remote areas without proper shops. Providing sports and recreational facilities may be part inducement for recruitment into these dangerous and hard jobs. But evaluating the correct cost, including the indirect expenditure on staff and operation is a must since the cost of these components increases with inflation. The salaries increase automatically under current rules! Proper accounting alone will allow a proper assessment of the affordability of the various perks and demands for their parity with international standards.

The same problem plagues the random Indian efforts in environmental protection and social policies. Particularly in urban situations, there is strong cooperation between the NGOs and the proactive judiciary. The only thing that is never explicitly considered is the cost of implementation. It is almost taken for granted that the government in non-implementation of some idea or the other is simply acting in cohort with "vested interests" or is simply inefficient. There is no assessment of the financial wherewithal of the country to implement the policies. One is forced to exclaim "it is no longer a tragedy, but a farce"

Identifying the problem is much easier than to resolve it. Decision regarding the affordability of a particular action depends on the specific details of the case and is also extremely subjective. There is no alternative to being aware that quite often the society cannot afford many of these and recognizing this inability as a valid argument. From advanced military hardware to a international sports extravaganza, from a prime minister's foreign tour to the creation of a tiger preserve, from enforcing pollution standards to provision of drinking water in villages, every desirable action has to be assessed on the base of the potential cost and the political party should not be ashamed to use poverty as an excuse. Assessing the actual realistic costs and making these trade-offs should be a responsibility of a newly emboldened and assertive political authority and not of the judiciary under the guise of an ever expanding notion of fundamental rights.

Eventually converting most of the perks provided to the government employees into financial equivalents is absolutely essential. This is a major job and will naturally be time consuming and actively resisted. But there is simply no alternative. The private sector normally provides perks in kind to avoid taxes. This is simply not a proper procedure for the government. Similarly, creating infrastructure and starving it of maintenance and depreciation is most counter productive. The current distinction between plan and non-plan expenditure has to be abolished and these expenditures treated on par. Proper esti-

mate of deferred spending on maintenance, retirement benefits and pensions is also very important. The problem of indirect subsidization identified here is significant not only for luxuries but even for the maintenance of a universal social safety net as shall be discussed next.

Economic Policies 3

The Social Safety Net

George Bernard Shaw, the fiery socialist thundered that equality between a man making a pound and one making a thousand is an absurdity and I agree. I wonder if a country can take pride in being the home of Taj Mahal while millions go to bed hungry. I would be willing to advocate selling the monument brick by brick to feed the hungry. There is not much sense in invoking the words of Jesus Christ "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for the rich to enter the kingdom of God". The "more practical" messenger, Prophet Mohammad asked his followers to donate a part and their wealth. Contemporary Muslims interpret this variously as either fortieth or a fifth. The condition of the poor in contemporary Islamic societies, even those that claim to religiously follow the "Sharia" does not reflect a generous redistribution. The liberal democracies of Scandinavia, despite their godless secular laws are more liberal with their "cradle to grave" security and are estimated to transfer about 10-12% of the GDP from the rich to the poor. Unfortunately, in the Indian context, what the economy can afford with "practical" level of support will not provide a safety net matching the western standards.

In contemporary India, as discussed in various essays, the governments, the non governmental organizations, judicial authorities and individuals have tried various approaches to bypass this constraint. Confused economic thinking sees market valuation as real wealth than merely notional and accentuates this desire. It is quite common to be-moan the Americans spending more on their dogs than on international aid without recognizing that a diversion of expenditure from the former would leave millions of Americans who provide goods and services to the pets jobless. As discussed before, expanding the concept of the fundamental rights is a favorite humanitarian approach towards egalitarianism of most Indians. This has shackled the economy and converted India into a "functional anarchy" but has failed to make it a more egalitarian society. However, since this is an ideology, as usual the failure is ascribed to implementation rather than the idea.

Successive governments have employed various indirect subsidies to create a sense of accomplishment. The complicated and confused approach is exemplified by the approach to food grains. The government subsidizes the fertilizer, its transport by railways, the diesel used as a fuel by the tractors and the electricity supplied. It then fixes a minimum support price to the farmer, offers to buy the grain even if it is damaged and then subsidizes the cost at which the food grains procured are actually distributed. The system is so complex that one is not sure what fraction of the amount is utilized for those really in need.

Expansion of the beneficiaries is always politically attractive. But this enhances the total cost and makes it difficult to sustain, but reducing the number of intended beneficiaries is politically suicidal! When cutoff levels are introduced, they are set at absurd levels. The definition of a "creamy layer" for backward caste reservations is a great example. The recent fracas over the subsidy on LPG cylinders for domestic use is an example of how even the relatively well off in India fight to retain microscopic benefits. Similarly, the recent food

security bill expands the scope to cover more than two thirds of the Indian population. In this competition of the undeserving, the really destitute will not even enjoy benefits on a pro rata basis. The delivery will be most inefficient and leaky in their case simply because their voices are least audible.

In addition to indirect government subsidies, independent India embarked on a series of measures for forcing the private sector. The rent control acts in the earlier period are a the best example. In the contemporary liberalized environment, the target has been private institutions providing education and health. The number of such institutions expanded as they began catering not merely to the minuscule aristocracy but to the middle class. These have become a tempting target both for the social activists and the political class. Unable to maintain standards in either the government schools or hospitals, passing a legislation reserving seats in these schools, (the right to education act) or state sponsored medical insurance for the poor have become the easiest way to claim political accomplishments. That the remaining users are being forced to cross subsidize these "accomplishments" of the political masters is simply forgotten. More importantly, this can only cater to a small minority since these are mostly located in the metropolitan areas. In any case the investment in infrastructure of government institutions and salaries is wasted.

Arguments in favor of cash transfers, the market based solutions are now the major "intellectual challenge" to the safety net. It is intellectually quite satisfying to argue that the government should simply provide a financial support and permit the destitute to buy the goods (food and accommodation) or services (medical or educational) in the market. This the argument goes, is a best of both worlds situation. The market mechanism is efficient and ensures that goods and services are available at low prices. The cash transfers ensure that there is a social safety net and no one is left destitute.

The limitations of cash transfer social security, particularly in the Indian context are not so obvious. Efficiency claims are often a smoke screen for hidden agenda of the small government ideology. In reality the market prices for essential goods are not influenced by the laws of demand and supply. There is always cartelization and pushing up prices since it is the "government that pays". In a weakly governed country like India, siphoning of the financial resources budgeted for food stamps and vouchers through illegal means would be a huge problem. These procedures end up hiding actual inefficiency in the social milieu of India. More importantly, there is great gender imbalance. It should not surprise anyone to see the cash transfers being routed for gambling and drinks by the dominant males! A payroll tax based social security system as in the USA is simply unviable since the job holders in the organized sector who can contribute are far outnumbered by those demanding the support.

Thus the proposal herein is to strictly avoid cash transfers and totally against the government sponsored purchase of services from the private sector. The requirement of food security, minimal shelter, educational and vocational training and medical services have to be provided in kind as direct government services. The coverage has to be modest to match what can be afforded by the economy but universal. There is no point in allowing our desire for an egalitarian society result in demanding the best for the poorest. In a battlefield, the general has to take decisions leading to success and cannot allow emotions to rule. The same applies to the creation of a universal social safety net. The challenge is to increase the efficiencies of government services. One major change is to transfer these to local government and avoid centralization. It is not leadership but individual responsibility that can ever deliver! Clearly, to achieve a significant transfer of resources and gradually enhance the quality of the safety net with time requires maximization of revenues. This will be discussed next.

Economic Policies 4

Maximizing Tax Revenue

John Maynard Keynes, made perhaps the most often quoted statement by an economist, "In the long run we are all dead". He was responding to the idea that markets are in the long run, the most efficient economic activity. My reservations about market approaches have been aired many times earlier. It is quite clear to me that "some are dead even in the short run unless supported by the government". A democratic society where freedoms are balanced by a safety net to prevent individuals from descending into despondency is simply the best system of governance that is humanly possible. Thus, the key requirement for implementing the policies being outlined for the future of "MY India" is to maximize the net tax revenue, which is the tax revenue left in the hands of the government after deducting the cost of collecting taxes.

It is general truism, that is bandied about by the proponents of free markets that high rates of taxation leads only to tax evasion. But, if this is accepted in toto, the ideal tax rate is zero! After all, that is best tax rate from the point of view of the taxpayer. For the present let us

accept Benjamin Franklin's comment that "The only things certain in life are death and taxes". The key is not merely maximization of revenue, but in particular maximization of funds for the safety net. Ultimately, even the honest tax payer would demand goods, indirect subsidies and services from the government in lieu of the taxes paid.

Many bemoan the low tax to GDP ratio in India. The inevitability of such a situation is never conceded. The bitter truth is that a vast segment of the Indian population is barely surviving and even that with contributions from the inefficient government programs. Only a small segment of the population have enough monetary income to enable the government to tax them. As said earlier in another essay also, one change in attitude is most important. People should come out of the habit of estimating presumed wealth and screaming about how this is not being channeled towards a more equitable or egalitarian society. Much of the wealth is really notional.

Deficit financing by the government, borrowing and spending beyond the available tax revenues leads to interest payments accounting for more than a third of the current tax revenues. More importantly, it leads to easier surrender to these demands by tax payers. Once you have the option of borrowing you end up borrowing to finance your unviable life style as every debtor knows. All this eventually leaves very little for the general safety net even if one ignores the undesirability of the next generation inheriting a debt. In the modern age, children are not legally responsible for their parents' debts but as taxpayers, responsible for the national debt created by the previous generation without even the option of declaring a bankruptcy.

Despite the inevitable short term pain caused by cutting the budgets and the arguments by eminent economists that government spending during recession is necessary, it is best to bite the bullet and demand that government balance budgets. Individuals can be net debtors, not governments! At the very least, deficit financing limited to a

set fraction of the GDP must be a short term measure. Even this must require support from across the political spectrum, for example a two third majority in the parliament. Renouncing deficit financing goes against the need for increasing the tax revenue, but this is a long term imperative and a target to achieve this in the medium term, say about ten years is a necessity.

In the Indian context, since most people are poor and there is not enough income or wealth to be taxed, successive governments have tended to depend on indirect taxes such as excise and sales tax so that the government can actually claim credit for some action. Immensely wealthy individuals and their ostentatious spending in a poor society is resented. Their ability to bend the system for their own benefit is feared. Conspicuous expenditure may be distasteful in a poor society, but it not a simple matter to divert that money towards charity. There is always a socialistic zeal to increase these indirect taxes on items deemed to be luxuries. In the efforts to increase tax revenues, emotional responses do more harm than good. If the items being taxed are really luxuries, they are consumed in small quantities. Despite penal taxes, net revenue would be negligible. These very high rates encourage tax avoidance. Policing efforts required to stop this leakage of revenue cut into the net revenue left. Fear of law is never a viable mechanism for ensuring compliance with tax laws or for that matter any of the other norms and rules of the society.

As the quantities consumed increase, the net tax revenue increases as do pressures in a democratic society against high rates. While there is a case for reducing the dependence on indirect taxes, only minor adjustment of the indirect tax regime is possible in the immediate future. As with deficit financing, sooner rather than later, indirect internal taxes should cease being a major source of funds for creating the safety net. Unfortunately, in the Indian context, there is extreme resistance to even a uniform tax regime due to political antagonism between political parties in power at the center and in the states. This

is abetted the fear of loosing the few powers available at the provincial and local levels. We shall return to this issue in a later discussion. But, free trade arguments and multinational agreements that advocate very low custom duties must be resisted effectively. If nothing else, the problems of the European Union show that expanding trade and increased economic efficiency that is dangled as a bait for these policies is not a universal cure for all economic problems. One cannot ignore the short term consequences of the loss of jobs and pressures on social security. Customs revenue must remain a major source of revenue for India.

There is a strong case for claiming that all mineral resources are collectively owned by the state and that ownership of land does not imply ownership of underground resources. The rapid depletion of the water table thanks to indiscriminate pumping of underground water for irrigation and other uses is a stark reminder of the problems associated with such ownership. A committed free marketer would attribute this to "the tragedy of the commons" and lack of "property rights" this is the usual parading of an unreliable economic science. In any case, revenue from royalties on minerals and other shared resources such as spectrum for telecommunications should be maximized. Unfortunately in contemporary India, royalty issues have become very controversial. The society has been forced away from the socialistic path of the public sector being the exclusive agency for exploration and use of the resources. But, in many recent cases, sanctions from the government for the private utilization of these resources have been used only to increase the share price in the stock market without even an intention to create a productive economic activity. Essentially this is insider trading, a cousin of crony capitalism. Ultimately any government is in a weak position. There will always be accusations of collusion, betrayal of public trust or at the very least squandering of resources. The Indian attitude of treating all presumed income as real is another major hurdle. A transparent mechanism for fixing a royalty as a fraction of international price and a fixed moderate period such as

15 years is absolutely necessary. This is one area that cannot be left to the discretion of the ruling party. Just as constitutional amendments require more than simple majorities, entrusting the responsibility to a committee representing the entire house rather than a minister may permit decisions being more harmonious.

The need for extra revenue for an effective social safety net is not helped by either avoidance of deficit financing or lowering internal taxes. Even enhanced customs revenue and royalties coupled to the clearing of socialistic deadwood and indirect extravagances will not suffice. Clearly, something novel has to be proposed to generate the tax revenue needed and simultaneously address the problems of black economy and economic fluctuations. The western wisdom that lowering rates will create better tax compliance is of not much use in a country where indiscipline has become a way of life. Realizing tax revenue from notional wealth is an illusion, but tax evasion and black money are not. Thus India should move from the income tax regime to a wealth tax regime or to be a more precise a Minimum Alternate Wealth Tax (MAWT) regime. In implementing this procedure India will truly be a leader of the third world much of which suffer the same cancer of low tax compliance and unaccounted wealth.

In most democratic societies, inequality is tolerated as necessary for an economically productive society. In any modern democratic system, a complex web of tax rules are employed to encourage long term productive investment. Thus, a company may issue bonus shares or follow policies leading to an increase in share price on the stock market rather pay out the profits which would attract income tax. Unquestionably, this reduces the tax revenue payable. The economist argues that the economy benefits. It is impossible to model the economy and predict quantitatively how much the economy benefits. More worryingly, economic theory does not quantify time! So it is not clear when these benefits would materialize. Even if it is not a case of "when the sky falls, we will catch the larks," the lower immediate tax

revenues result in a weaker safety net for precisely those who have to wait the maximum time for the trickle down to be effective. Against the backdrop of accelerated accumulation of wealth in the top 10% and more predominantly in the top 1% observed in most advanced societies and the pressures on social spending due to budget deficits, expecting the economic producers to pay higher taxes in the short term is reasonable.

Unfortunately, in underdeveloped India, an even more important issue is economically unproductive investment. The world over, master pieces of art are prized possessions as much or perhaps even more for the appreciation of their value than for their intrinsic artistic value. The total value of such assets is a small fraction of the economy. In the Indian context, misguided socialistic policies that reduce supply, absurd notions of fundamental rights and horrendous legal delays highlighted earlier have together created a real estate market that is both unproductive and a major source of black money. The usual preference to invest in real estate in the expectation of fast appreciation despite low rents and legal hassles contributes to these assets being unoccupied and ultimately unproductive.

Imposing a minimum alternate wealth tax would provide a viable means of checking both the above limitations without wading into the complex tax and exemption regime. The wealth determined at current prices, exempting one residential house should be taxed at a modest rate. This will be compared with the income and corporate tax as it exists. The MAWT would be collected only if it is larger. This will clearly restrict the efforts of individuals to accumulate wealth over long periods without contributing to current taxes either through a black economy or an ever appreciating stock value. At the same time, the mandatory self declaration of the details of all wealth, including real estate, deposits in banks, shares and gold would force black money to be revealed. It would be easy to confiscate any assets that are not reflected in the self declaration. The valuation would be on the basis of

the government notified prices for the real estate and on the minimum price during the previous year for shares and other assets whose prices fluctuate. Individuals will be forced to liquidate vast unproductive real estate holdings, which will enhance the supply of land. This will supplement the proposal in an earlier essay regarding land held by failed industries and institutions. The salaried employee who usually pays income tax will be rarely called on to pay MAWT since one residential property is exempt. Given the complexity of the modern economy, economists dismiss simple minded solutions like flat taxes, but clearly this alternate tax concept is more subtle and sensible.

Another unproductive area of modern economy is the financial market, though this is never conceded by the professional economist. Ultimately, the whole purpose of the financial market is to direct savings from the individuals to producers who need capital. In the modern economy, complex financial instruments have been created. These are claimed to model and assess the risks and returns to guide investor decisions. As usual with modern economics, these models do not quantify time* required for any productive economic activity. A large fraction of buying and selling of shares and complex financial intermediaries takes place much faster than the time required for any productive activity and is simply gambling. Such activity is no doubt necessary, but the key problem is the scale of such operations.

Superficially, the problem is the same as that of ascetics, who renounce personal comforts and try to serve the society. While all religions hold such life choices as exemplary, the unexpressed expectation is that only a few join so that the society may still function. Unfortunately, in the economic sphere, large net worth individuals have the ability to absorb large temporary losses and today participate primarily in this short term activity. Such speculative behavior, particularly in the context of commodities is really not productive. Thus India should

form the vanguard in controlling the exuberance of the financial experts. A small tax on all short term transactions irrespective of the profit or loss and on commodity speculators in general is proposed which would also serve as a source of additional tax revenue. It is only to be expected that there would be a large hue and cry about these taxation proposals with disdain about proposals from individuals who are unlettered in economic science, but the bottom line is that I am unwilling to accept that economics is a science in any sense. In conclusion, MAWT, tax on Stock Market transactions, enhanced customs and efficient use of natural resources will form the mechanisms proposed to enhance revenues. These will compliment an unflinching curtailment of un-affordable luxuries and help create an effective universal safety net for “MY India”.

Social Policies 1

Reservations

The social policy is not divorced from the key suggestions made earlier; the creation of the universal safety net, the exit of the government from all competitive economic activity, the removal of hidden subsidies and the changes in the legal framework. However, in the Indian context, reservations or policies of positive discrimination have the largest emotional impact. In as much as "MY India" aspires to be democratic, it has to put in place its own framework for fine tuning the current policies. Changes proposed herein may be innovative, startling and novel, but they are designed to be implemented incrementally without rocking the existing system. The philosophy is as usual moderate. Thus, there will be no abrupt change in the current policies. At the same time, there will be no additional reservation for any new group or caste.

Whether one views the reservation of jobs and seats in the educational institutions as reparations for past injustices to certain sections or as support for current handicaps, several observations have to

be accepted. Firstly, the most disadvantaged groups, the dalits and the tribals have been given the protection for over sixty years. Even the most ardent supporter has to concede that the record of achievement is at best patchy. This last statement could be challenged and like all ideologues, supporters will naturally blame implementation rather than the method. However, extending the methodology to groups with a smaller degree of disadvantages, no historical injustices and significant subgroups with high economic and educational attainments is questionable. Finally, most current demands and their acceptance are linked to electoral politics, something that is explicitly opposed to the philosophy of "MY India".

There have been several calls to replace the current reservation policy with a handicap system where the individual will be given a percentage boost for handicaps such as poverty and lack of parental education. Since political parties give more weight to perceived electoral advantages, these have never been given a serious consideration that they deserve. It also runs counter to demands for reparations for themselves as the descendants of ancient victims from current descendants of ancient criminals. As was made clear, "MY India" does not recognize these demands nor do I have any such guilty conscience. Compensating for handicaps is however an obviously just requirement. Everyone concedes that sooner or later the country has to move from the current policy to one emphasizing handicaps rather than birth.

To balance the desire not to make impractical revolutionary changes with the necessity to initiate this transformation, it is proposed to start with a hybrid system where handicap benefits are provided independently in both general and reserved categories. Thus, one ends up accepting that an extremely poor rural student with illiterate parents who has managed to pass an examination has the same merit as a rich student with educated parents getting the first division, having studied in a prestigious (so called) public school in Delhi. The exact quantum of benefit can be fine tuned based on experience.

Using this criteria for within the "reserved categories" is also justified. Once we have agreed that "merit" cannot be a sole criterion in the interests of social justice, it is obvious that the same social justice demands that one prefer a relatively more handicapped tribal or dalit. Once the system is fine tuned and demonstrated to be fair, there is every hope that the handicap approach will be accepted by the entire society.

The merit list itself has become controversial in the Indian context. It is routinely accepted that the various universities and boards of examination have widely differing standards. It is even acknowledged that there is an active competition to be liberal with the evaluation and giving marks so that "ones own" students are not at a disadvantage. Acceptance of this parochialism without even a pretence of condemnation is a pathetic comment about standards in India. Significant number of students from a wide range of institutions seek admission in the prestigious "National Institutions" resulting in a plethora of entrance tests and examinations. Earlier, I analyzed how these entrance tests become tougher as the demand increases, without any relevance to the course to be studied or the job to be performed. The problem extends to selections for government jobs. The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) and various state counterparts keep everyone running around in circles, in search of objective criteria for the preparation of the merit lists. The eventual recourse is to have interviews which as can be easily guessed are the most subjective means of evaluation and the easiest to subvert.

The sad reality is that a well known solution to the problem exists and with the current explosion of the internet, most easy to implement. A timed objective type examination serves the purpose. The evaluation can be easily confirmed to be objective and not easily corrupted. Also, by introducing time, the cream can be easily separated. One simply accepts that a candidate performing faster is superior. As with any human convention there are limitations. The most important

is to deal with non-science disciplines (humanities) where objective questions can be answered by rote learning. The answer is to have language and logic examinations as in the internationally accepted GRE/GMAT tests. True there are major objections to the use of such tests. The complaint against rigidity is valid as is a demand for flexibility. But the key problem in the Indian context is the extreme distrust among individuals and groups. Complaints about the disadvantage for handicapped individuals are very common and there is never any trust in subjective decisions. By creating a wide bank of timed tests with no upper limit, covering logic, IQ, languages and subjects, one can provide flexibility to the institutions trying to select students or recruit employees to opt for their own choice of tests for their objective decision making. The requirement for social justice will then be served by the handicap compensation outlined above.

With the movement away from a socialist economy, there have been persistent demands for extending reservations to the private sector. Once again, given the attitudes and preferences of the Indian citizens there is a significant support. Just as reservations for backward classes were implemented by the then prime minister V P Singh purely for his political survival, one can expect implementation of reservations in the private sector, in a cynical game of electoral arithmetic. As outlined above, one expects the future "MY India" to have empathy for handicaps but oppose sectarian divisions. The accusations of discrimination in private sector hiring cannot and should not be brushed under the carpet. "Freedom" is not a valid defense. In several of these essays, a purely empirical common law approach has been held as the best option for developing the best possible human societies. So it is sensible to seek a simple mechanism for preventing discrimination in the private sector, while retaining the managerial powers required for successful running of private sector entities.

An investigative agency for detecting and punishing discrimination appears attractive. Such agencies have been set up in various

advanced societies. These are empowered to investigate complaints and often have powers sanction compensation. Even in these societies, with significant commitment to freedoms, the agencies bend over backwards to side with the complainant. There are several reasons for this. Individuals who aspire to be a part of these agencies will have genuine emotional sympathy towards these claims. Any attempt to vest these powers in someone "not genuinely sympathetic" will be savagely attacked as an attempt to sabotage the progressive efforts. Every negative decision will be severely resented by the politically correct brigade and becomes a media circus. In the Indian context, strong ideological biases and minimal commitment to individual freedoms would create a chaos in implementation. This is being observed with complaints of sexual harassment in contemporary India. It becomes a burden of proving one's innocence rather than the prosecution proving a case beyond reasonable doubt.

Thus, the proposed agency will not accept or investigate individual complaints. Rather it will undertake random sting operations to investigate hiring. This will involve submitting applications of genuine candidates with false identities or entirely fictitious applications to test the honesty of the process. Failures will attract large fines and an advice to the private institutions to replace the employees responsible for hiring. The private sector would also be encouraged to adopt the objective criteria using the government sponsored common tests outlined above. The benefit will not only be the lowered risk of sting investigations and fines. A small tax rebate may be offered in return for such policies.

The tax benefits could be enhanced if the private sector organizations offer handicap benefits for economic backwardness and lack of parental education of the candidates. This carrot (tax rebates) and stick (sting) approach would not in anyway compromise the basic freedom of the managers of private sector. Success in the private sector may serve as a catalyst of the eventual goal of replacing the reserva-

tion policies with a more sensible approach of helping the genuinely handicapped.

Social Policies 2

Supporting Secularism

Even against the backdrop of the many failures of the Indian state since independence, its inability to support secularism deserves condemnation. The failure on the economic front has many contributions. The choice of a socialistic polity is major, but as mentioned earlier, it was inevitable given the association of the colonial masters with the capitalist system and the ascendancy of the socialistic thought in the first half of the twentieth century. India was not unique in having to reverse socialistic policies in a free democratic society.

The failure on the secular front has been the consequence of India trying to create a unique version of secularism distinct from the western idea of secularism as the freedom of the individual. There is a continued insistence that secularism universally should mean equal respect for all religions and at the very least it should be so in the Indian context. Even if the provision of separate personal laws was seen as a necessity in the context of the partition riots, vote bank politics have ensured that there has been no action whatsoever towards a uniform civil code. As was mentioned earlier, the reversal of the deci-

sion of the supreme court in the Shah Bano case by the Indian parliament was the final proof of the ascendancy of vote bank induced minority cuddling.

"MY India" stands uncompromisingly behind an idea of individual freedom. As was emphasized time and again, the government of "MY India" cannot leave all the destitute at the mercy of individual charity. So a government supported safety net has to be devised. Similarly, the individual is entitled to a minimal safety net of secular protection from religious bigots. Both the quality of support afforded by the safety net in economic terms and the legal approved norms of social and individual secular behavior are not absolute but depend on the society. The former depends on the economic wherewithal and the later on the social norms of the society as decided by a democratic process. Thus, there is no call for a revolutionary change which never succeeds in a democracy. The proposals for planning a future of "MY India" have to be pragmatic and far seeking. The proposals for changes in the legal rules discussed here are as usual practical.

To begin with emotional and symbolic appeals in favor of disadvantaged sections have to be stopped. An example is the appeal by the elected representatives to banks or other private organizations to give loans or not to discriminate against minorities or women. These, like the ex gratia payments discussed in an earlier essay are political gimmicks and publicity seeking at others expense. Such measures are not legal requirements because they are impractical. The organizations should be punished for illegal actions, but these pious calls are silly to say the least and often counterproductive.

More troublesome is emotional meddling in basic principles of natural justice for emotional reasons. Just as strong tenancy rules, nationalization without compensation and retrospective application of laws led to the gridlocked immobile socialistic economy, meddling with laws has contributed to the sad present state of "MY India" that

was detailed earlier. There is no doubt whatsoever of the disadvantages suffered by sections of our society; women dalits or the impoverished. But just as the only viable mechanism for redressal of economic imbalances is the creation through hard work of an effective safety net, social imbalances can only be corrected by empowerment coupled with diligent prosecution for which the special laws of protecting the disadvantaged are not necessary. The legal delays that have been highlighted contribute more to the sad reality of unimplemented laws. Creating evermore complex laws is as useless as writing the worlds lengthiest constitution and amending it endlessly.

While the above policy prescription for a future of “MY India” is mostly refraining from continuing the previous approach, a proactive component is a necessity for making at least some progress towards a secular society. This cannot be achieved by throwing the society into turmoil with calls for a uniform civil code. Motives for such calls will always be doubted and justifiably so when the proponents advocate medieval policies in some other cases.

But it is necessary to empower individuals to choose secular modern laws in personal matters as for example, gender equality in property inheritance, divorce etc. This should take the form of a legally binding declaration by an individual that he would in future be covered by the uniform civil code and renounces the laws based on his community of birth. The usual answer would be to dismiss this as unwanted and unnecessary. But then as George Bernard Shaw asked "If the prisoner is happy, why lock him in? If he is not, why pretend that he is"? As of today, there is no way an individual can renounce being bound by the personal laws of his religion. There is no comprehensive secular progressive code of personal law for which an individual may opt. As usual, even this concession will be unpalatable to the religious conservatives who fear its strength while the progressives, with their rhetoric and dreams of revolution would disdain to support it. However, the social policy being proposed is not an "in-your-face"

defiance that provokes immediate social reaction. Thus the individuals can only avail of the provisions of an optional secular personal law without flaunting them or teasing the majority. This caution is extremely relevant in India with the abysmal contemporary record of "honor killings" and "feudalistic world views".

Regretfully, in the near term, it will only be possible to only support individuals who have the discipline and capability to keep a low profile while challenging these societal norms. The failed approaches followed since independence have created a stratified society where, a small rich segment which docilely accepts all western norms coexists with unapologetic defenders of medieval social norms whose influence on the society is sadly increasing. The proposed personal civil code would thus act as a trigger to a slow transformation of the social outlook which is essential for the future of "MY India".

Social Policies 3

International Interactions

As seen in several earlier essays, post independent India has chosen to create an extremely unworkable system. The expansive definition of fundamental rights to create an egalitarian, socialistic order without the coercion of the communist world are major components of this emotional and impractical world view. This same naivete has characterized India's interaction with the rest of the world. Most Indians however prefer not to acknowledge the failure of the system except for the Chinese debacle of the early sixties, which is too big to brush under the carpet. As committed ideologues, rather than own the foolishness of the approach, the blame is laid on the rest of the world being "too selfish". If the future of "My India" has to be safeguarded, it is necessary to face the reality, disown unworkable ideas despite their emotional appeal and make a fresh start.

Nowhere is realism more important than in Indo-Pak relations and in the Kashmir problem. As an earlier discussion made clear, there is little reason for the nostalgia of pre-partition India. Further, it is very clear that the aspirations of the majority in Pakistan will not be

satisfied by a secular entity like "MY India". The overwhelming majority of Muslims in India are not sympathetic to Pakistan, but it has to be admitted that the aspirations of at least a significant segment come into conflict with a secular and modern world view. Undoubtedly some Indians belonging to other segments of the society have similar reservations about some aspects of "MY India" as discussed here.

In the short and medium time scales, the best that can be accomplished is to prevent large scale disturbances. Prospects for any "emotional rapprochement" are bleak. One-sided concessions regarding "most favored nation" status or visas permitting Pakistan citizens to work in India will not help and may even be counterproductive. Thus these approaches have to be replaced by a strict *quid pro quo* approach where the exact policies followed by Pakistan will be reciprocated.

Kashmir is a challenge to internal democracy. The problem as discussed earlier is that most Indians and not merely the Kashmiris are reluctant democrats who chant democracy when they are sure of winning but not otherwise. The necessity for a concerted effort to create a willingness to accept local democratic decision making has been made earlier in the context of many local problems. Pending the successful implementation of these mechanisms and the emergence of a majority in India that truly accepts majority decisions, the international effort of "MY India" in the short and medium term has to be resigned acceptance of the impossibility to resolve the issue. Containment of anger and frustration is the best that can be done.

Environmentalism has replaced socialism as the main slogan of India. The environmentalist ideology of opposing everything in sight is a major headache. Once again, in addition to the innate emotional commitment to the cause, one sees a desire to leapfrog the advanced

* How Well Do We Know It (Chapter 11)

societies. It is also an attempt to push the advanced societies in a more egalitarian direction through the fears of an environmental Armageddon. As was discussed at length elsewhere*, public cannot be frightened into sharing by fears about the future. In any case, quantitatively, restricting travel and energy spent on space conditioning are the only areas where significant conservation of energy is possible.

India will have to resist the internationally binding policies prescribed by environmentalists as unworkable, unaffordable and above all else extremely counterproductive in the short run. Poverty is ultimately the greatest challenge and also a huge contributor to inefficient use of resources. As a measure of reassurance, island nations that fear catastrophe can be offered sanctuary for migration.

International negotiations for free trade are similar to those for environmental protection. In one case, countries which have freely polluted the atmosphere for economic development demand that the poorer countries compromise with their current requirement to pollute and develop. But, there is no way to break the correlation between progress and pollution. In the second, countries which have freely employed custom barriers to develop their own industrial capabilities preach the mantra of free trade as the solution to the current problems of the less developed societies. In preaching this "free market" ideology both the limitations of economics as a science and the current problems of the European Union are ignored.

No country in the world exists without some government sponsored social justice program which works by transfer of resources to the poor. Shorn of all the economic jargon, the problem with EU is the unwillingness of the workers of the richer countries to pay dole to unemployed workers in poorer EU countries on par with citizens of his own country. Customs duties are a required protection within a political entity to balance its economic progress and future economic gains with its requirement of resources for current social justice pro-

grams. This cannot be precisely dictated by uniform international rules. As with many other situations such efforts at over precise control of complex economic or societal entities is counter productive.

In both environment and trade negotiations, countries act as independent actors. In reality, these independent countries vary from microscopic entities with small populations to continental size countries, sometimes with a large fraction of the global population. Thus the negotiations and eventual agreements may not serve India's interests. This is a major problem and may require "MY India" to bravely go it alone! This may mean isolation internationally at least temporarily, but this is an absolute requirement.

India has once in the past insisted on going it alone. Unfortunately this was against the nuclear nonproliferation treaty. It demanded nations which did not have nuclear weapons to desist from acquiring them and subject themselves to stringent verification procedures. But there were no obligations for those who had the weapons to actually eliminate them. This was termed nuclear apartheid by India. The moral high ground became untenable in due course with the "nuclear explosion for peaceful purposes". Eventually India joined the mainstream with special privileges.

Actually both atomic power and atomic weapons are absolutely useless. Indigenous Indian effort at getting a significant part of the energy requirement from atomic power has remained a day dream. A modest ten thousand megawatt production target was set more than fifty years ago but even this has not been achieved till date. Now the government is trying to attract private companies to set up these plants. The fears of the environmentalists regarding the dangerous pollution from atomic power plants have been actualized with recent Tsunami related accident in Japan. Claims that such extremely rare catastrophes have been provided for is scientific nonsense. It is even more difficult to trust that under Indian conditions, such disasters could be

contained even to the level achieved in Japan. The ease with which an old radioactive source from the Delhi University ended in the scrap metal yards of Delhi is a big indicator.

But there are even stronger arguments against nuclear power. The cost of nuclear power that is bandied about does not include the cost of the decommissioning the units and guarding the radio active remains for several hundred years from unauthorized personnel and criminals. This cost alone makes the economics of nuclear power a joke. To look at the nuclear arsenal from the prism of the second world war is also a mistake. In the contemporary world, the sole super power is being pilloried for permitting phone tapping and invading piracy. The reaction of the world to any actual use of nuclear weapons can be easily imagined. At the very least "My India" has to call for a complete moratorium on India's activity towards both nuclear power and weapons. Since India is a democratic country the possibility of future governments with alternate world views being elected is very real. Thus a provision has to be made for controlled reversal of policies.

While India was so seriously arguing about the nuclear apartheid, it has taken little notice of the real apartheid in the Security Council of the United Nations, where the victors of the Second World War rule over the rest of humanity which was not even on the losing side! As mentioned above, all politically independent countries do not represent equal populations or even geographical landmass. This makes the so called consensus or compromise in international treaties simply hidden hegemony. There has to be a concerted action towards exposing this limitation of the contemporary international order.

This is not merely because whoever governs India represents a sixth of the world population. It is a clear indication that the so called "international rules, laws and norms" are extremely unjustified and use of coercive force in the name of a patently apartheid organization is even more so. Hopefully "MY India", if only for its own benefit

challenges this status quo if necessary by disengaging or at least downgrading the interactions with the United Nations and other multinational agencies. India's acceptance of this route and more importantly pay the price for this, very much like China, which declined to join these very organizations for more than a quarter century would be a true harbinger of a possible emergence of a golden future for "MY India".

The Call

My little son, all of seven years old, innocently asked a profound question after a short visit to the USA. Why are there so many speed breakers in India? The answer that he would not be able to understand is, Indians are fundamentally undisciplined. The society accepts that almost everyone is undisciplined and hence mere sign boards will not suffice to enforce speed limits.

The great economist Amartya Sen felt an Indian is fundamentally argumentative. But an Indian, in particular a contemporary Indian is fundamentally undisciplined. Consequently, he disdains to improve his competence to fight with the circumstances. The socialistic bias that I have unearthed in many of the discussions here is not only borne out of empathy towards those who are less fortunate. It is also borne out of the crushing internal realization of their own inferiority. Thus every success or achievement is simply attributed to circumstances or luck. Naturally, one is reluctant to admit that someone else has accomplished anything because of innate capabilities or sheer hard work. As a corollary socialistic rhetoric is supported without limit. True, ac-

tion by a group is necessary for transforming the society, but as the failure of French revolution reminds one, action for the group in the name of social justice will lead to neither progress nor justice.

As Swami Vivekananda emphasized, you cannot preach to an empty stomach. But Indians tend to magnify the smallest of disadvantages and use them as justifications for their incompetence, lack of discipline and unwillingness to own responsibilities.

Rabindra Nath Tagore gave vent to his desire for India to awaken into a heaven of freedom where the mind is without fear. While sharing the attributes of his heaven, one perforce has to admit that it is not "My Father" who can let the country awake into that glorious future of "MY India". Maybe, if the sky falls, we shall all catch larks, but that is not an eventuality that may be counted upon.

Though it draws on the experience and knowledge of the advanced societies that we envy, my conception of "MY India", is far better. The call is for us to abandon the silly expectation that the current path of independent India is a viable approach to progress. The necessity is for everyone to shoulder individual responsibilities. Ultimately discipline cannot be enforced. It has to be innate. Discipline leads to progress not vice versa.

Swami Vivekananda, it is said gave his clarion call, "*arise, awake, stop not until your goal is achieved*" looking at the Indian peninsula from what is today called the Vivekananda Rock. I have chosen to use a similar image of the earth from space on the cover. But how useful is a polemic from an individual who has no accomplishments and no credentials to offer advice? I only hope that the reader who has read to this point is a "*homo logicus*" who understands logic, has an open mind, can evaluate what has been said and approve it.

These are a series of independent essays about India, its past and its present, which form a background for proposing a program for contributing to a better future for "MY India". My past analysis of scientific knowledge showed that in both personal and societal decision making, highly precise, expert enquiry is intellectually satisfying but offers no useful guidance for action. Thus, commonsense and objectivity are sufficient for identification of practicable plans. "MY India" accepts common human knowledge and experience without emotional commitment to either ancient wisdom or modern ideology. Seeds of "MY India" were planted two hundred years ago. But, progress is inhibited by the path chosen after independence. Hopefully, the criticism of the mainstream, socialist intellectualism, responsible for this choice and comprehensive proposals which reverse this would be accepted and implemented so that a glorious future for "MY India" might become a reality.

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